

# Intertext

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# INTERTEXT

2021 | SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

# INTERTEXT

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Patrick W. Berry

*Intertext* is a publication of the Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition at Syracuse University. It features the work of undergraduate students and represents the quality and variety of writing produced in its courses.

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The Louise Wetherbee Phelps Awards recognizes excellence in writing in department courses. The 2021 winners are "Starve to Death" by Rosalyn Impink and "The Best Player in Town" by Collin Helwig.

The Margaret Himley Award for Critical Encounters through Writing recognizes academic excellence and a commitment to improving the world, addressing urgent and important issues, forging connections across differences, and inspiring social action. The 2021 winner is "Sex Education in the Statehouse" by Madeline Caruso.

Cover design by Drew Harper. Art by Julianna Markus.



“While we once asked how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe, now we assert: How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?”

—Amanda Gorman, “The Hill We Climb”

On the first day of class, we sat in our socially-distanced chairs, masks on, listening to Patrick discuss how this semester would be different. Patrick said he would normally bring in bagels for us to snack on and enjoy together, but one disheartening change this year was the fact that we could no longer eat in class. Like the lack of bagels, this semester has been disappointing, to say the least. In what is arguably the largest growth period of our lives, we’ve lost basketball games, our concept of time, and the sense of community that the university is so eager for us to have. A movie night over Zoom just isn’t the same. We’d like to say we’ve grown through it, but everyday feels like the last, a bit harder to get out of bed. This class, though, has given us a sense of community in an *unprecedented* time of loneliness. We’re all lonely together, and some of these pieces reflect that.

Each of the editors were asked, “What does it mean to be a college student right now?” as we struggle through this together. Our class is just a small sample of some of the challenges and struggles that COVID-19 loaded onto our generation. The next page is a visual representation of these struggles. The art we chose to accompany the words and snapshots of our editors sums up the chaos and confusion of being a student during a pandemic. One thing that stood out to us is that it wasn’t all bad. Despite the stress and anxiety, students are still able to find joy in

the small things. We want that to define our generation. We have marched through resistance, proved our resilience, and are still able to recognize the beauty in the small moments.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank all of the authors, artists, and photographers who contributed to this issue. Your insights made a lonely time a little more hopeful. We want to acknowledge Professor Patrick W. Berry for all of his guidance throughout the process. He was instrumental in piecing together this publication, and we would have been lost without him. Though we did not get bagels, we are more than grateful for his other contributions, such as his ongoing dedication to us and the publication. Thank you to Benay Bubar for her guidance on copy-editing, to Wendy Mansfield for her feedback on the layouts, and to Barbara Lynn Cantone for sharing her experiences as a writer. Thank you also to the judges of the Louise Wetherbee Phelps Awards and the Margaret Himley Award for Critical Encounters through Writing: Rae Ann Meriwether, Brice Nordquist, Emily Pifer, and Nicholas Rys. Without you, *Intertext* would not be complete.

Finally, we want to thank you, the readers, for taking time to enjoy the little slices of life we have curated. During such a difficult semester, we are all looking for connections, and hopefully *Intertext* offers some resonance.

—Ashley Clemens, Kyle McDonald, and Ariel Samuel

Layout by Ariel Samuel. Art by Kristina Sarowitz. “Manifest.”





“In 2021, we’ve had to alter the narrative—our definition of a ‘crazy night’ has been forever changed.” —Chloe Hechter

“Dutiful patience has turned to anxiousness as the rules of the pandemic have become the new norm.” —Drew Harper

“Being a college student now is far different than what it meant to be one just a year and a half ago.” —Kyle McDonald

“It wouldn’t be out of line to say that we, as a university, have taken an even larger hit to our identity than most other schools.” —Mira Sickinger

“To be a student this year is to sit by a window but a few inches thick and still feel that the distance through that window to the world outside could be measured in miles.” —Cameron Macaulay

“As the shutdown began, I couldn’t help but pity myself, thinking this is the worst possible stage of my life for the world to go on pause.” —Jeanette Orlando

“Being a student right now feels at times like a scam. This isn’t what I signed up for. However, as a student, I feel it is my ultimate responsibility to learn, even if I’m learning things in a different way than I initially planned.” —Lydia Engel

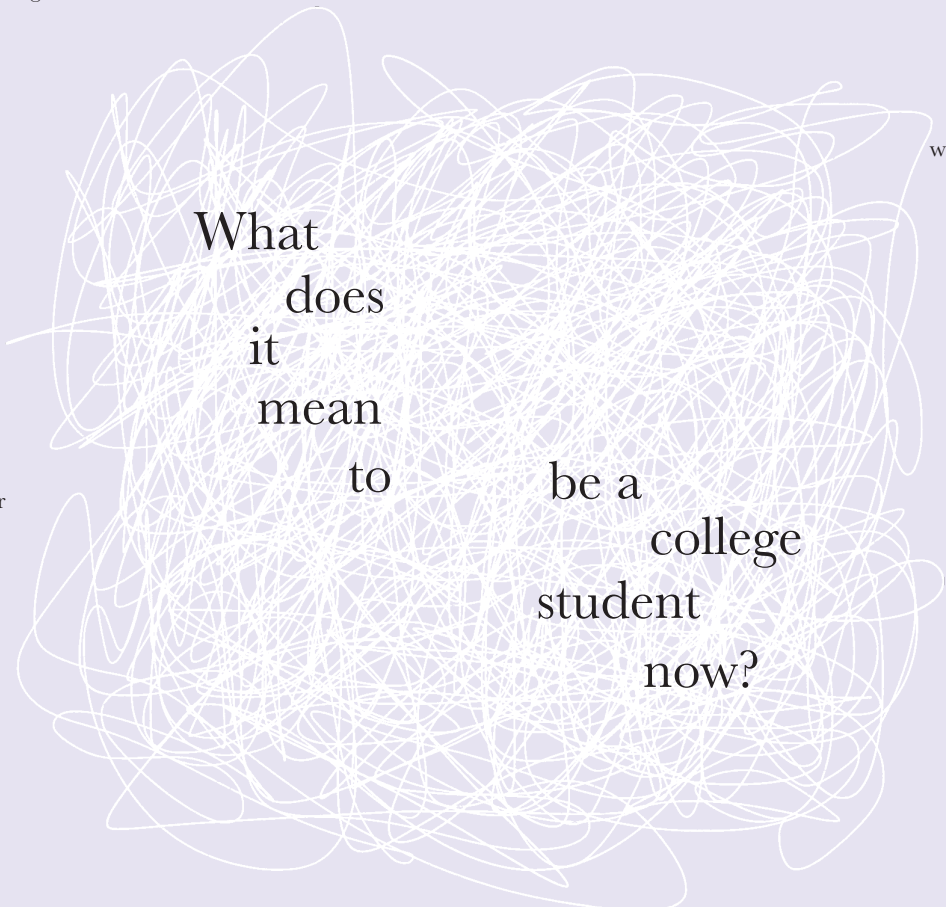
“The ideal college experience that I envisioned ceases to exist, and sometimes it feels as though it won’t be a reality for a long while.” —Aminata Ceesay

“I am in my room, not a classroom.  
Thus, I feel less responsible to be present.” —Benjamin Goldsmith

“But on the bright side, it is much easier to sleep in, and I have time to bake cookies between classes.” —Bonnie Yu

“It’s really not nothing: It’s going to class, trying to do the readings, cooking, putting on a mask, taking off a mask, trying to do the readings, going to class again.” —Ashley Clemens

“Despite all of this uncertainty, I am certain that our class will have an unbreakable bond because of our shared experiences and all of the time spent waiting in lines together, six feet apart.” —Ariel Samuel



What  
does  
it  
mean  
to  
be a  
college  
student  
now?

# CONTRIBUTORS

et al.: Intertext 2021 — Complete Issue



**Nidaa Aljabbarin**, "The Day I Left"

Major: Biology

*"I am a refugee who has been in the United States since 2016. I hope to open the door for other students to share their stories in creative ways that can be heard globally."*

**Rosalyn Impink**, "Starve to Death," written for WRT 205

Major: Policy Studies

*"I believe it is critically important for the diaspora to keep ancestral stories alive as a reminder of the sacrifices, bravery, and triumphs of generations of Armenians."*



**Ibraheem Abdi**, "Arrowhead"

Major: Social Work

*"'Arrowhead' is a story about staying strong when hardship strikes."*

**Guiv Lederer**, "My Server, My People," written for WRT 105

Major: Television, Radio, & Film

*"This piece wrote itself. It's just an ode to the people who helped keep me sane online during quarantine."*



**Christian Abdo**, "No Cancer," written for WRT 114

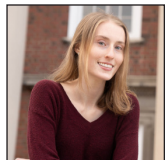
Major: Broadcast & Digital Journalism

*"A true story about why my friends and I looked like Q-tips for at least a month."*

**Alexandra Manzano**, "Zen," written for WRT 422

Major: Illustration

*"This piece was inspired by the style of David Sedaris's 'Active Shooter.'"*



**Lily Biagi**, "An Hour in Hell," written for WRT 114

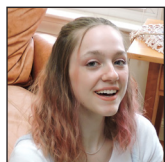
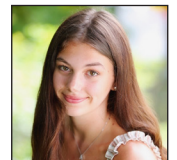
Major: Political Science

*"A memory I will never forget: learning about marriage in my Catholic Religious Education class."*

**Alison Pelkonen**, "The Pulchritudinous Cardinal," written for WRT 114

Major: Psychology

*"We have all been affected by COVID-19, yet a quick visit from a cardinal turned my life around."*



**Madeline Caruso**, "Sex Education at the State House," written for WRT 205

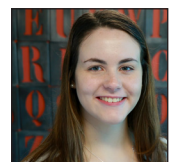
Major: Music Education

*"The story I tell in this piece is to this day one of the coolest stories I get to tell, and it really broadened my view of what civic discourse could look like."*

**Shelby Rodger**, "Μου λείπεις (Μου Λείπεis)," written for WRT 422

Major: Film

*"This personal essay follows my childhood from the perspective of my relationship with my yiayia—my Greek grandmother."*



**David Harvey**, "Comfortably Hidden," written for WRT 255

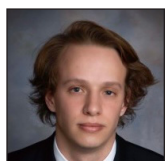
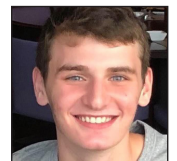
Major: Biology

*"As a triplet from a large family, I have always valued social interactions. These connections bind our society together, yet we seem to be at a crossroads now."*

**Andrew Parker Schiffer**, "Say Their Names," written for WRT 422

Major: Sport Management

*"This piece summarizes my first experience with the Black Lives Matter movement and the subsequent changes I have made in my life."*



**Collin Helwig**, "The Best Player in Town," written for WRT 422

Major: Writing & Rhetoric

*"I reflect on my innocence as a child and how it blanketed me from some of life's darker aspects, all the while surrounded by my childhood love for basketball."*

**Alesandra "Sasha" Temerte**, "Fight or Flight: The Biology of an Anxiety Attack," written for WRT 422

Majors: Economics, Writing & Rhetoric | Minors: Spanish, Strategic Management

*"This piece serves as a creative account of the biological factors that work together to create the seemingly inexplicable and overwhelming experience of anxiety."*



Layout by Cameron Macaulay



# RESISTANCE



Layout by Aminata Ceesay. Art by Kristina Starowitz, "the gift, Wing."

The events this past year have led many of us to scrutinize our social systems in ways that we previously had not. The Black Lives Matter protests that followed the murder of George Floyd led to massive social upheaval. Today, the situation only seems to compound further in these times of constant change. With America's historical record of racial discrimination at the center of the conversation, systemic injustices have taken a frontal position in our political discourse.

To move the needle forward on a variety of topics, we must challenge our norms and examine the established mechanisms within our communities which have enabled harmful sociological structures. We must recognize that although resistance can carry a connotation of violence, resistance can also involve peaceful civil discourse. Protest doesn't always mean physical action. Rather, it can be something that sparks a conversation. Acknowledging and discussing the injustices and oppressive systems you live within is a form of resistance.

Most forms of oppression are systematic. They are interwoven into every structure of our society, so much so that some of us forget they exist. The Black Lives Matter protests showcased the importance of intersectionality and inclusion. History has tried to portray Black people as a monolith, sharing the same experiences, grievances, and traumas. This is far from the lived experiences of Black Americans.

The movement tried using the unjust experiences of Black men to represent those of all Black people. Still, many of us called for greater attention to Black women and Black

trans people. Viewing the oppression of Black people or any other group through an intersectional lens allows us to analyze and understand unique perspectives from different people. It allows us to see how individuals within these groups are systematically and societally impacted.

As a community, we will resist. We will open the floor. We will talk. We will learn. We will create solutions with all people in mind.

In "Sex Education at the State House," Madeline Caruso witnesses the strengths and weaknesses of America's civic discourse system, illustrating the way cooperative public engagement can steer educational policy, even in the face of misinformation.

In "An Hour in Hell," Lily Biagi is forced to emotionally confront the bigoted teachings of her community's religious doctrine, while supporting a close friend who has been directly hurt by this rhetoric. This piece shines a light on the difficulties faced when forced to resist an institutional belief.

In "Say Their Names," Andrew Parker Schiffer highlights the importance of remembrance, advocacy, and allyship during these fraught times. This piece emphasizes how the fight for institutional and social racial equality is not just a Black issue.

In "Starve to Death," Rosalyn Impink recounts a tale of genocide, the tremendous strength it takes to overcome pain, and the work it takes to create a more prosperous life in a new place.

These authors put forth their efforts and demonstrate the various ways that we, too, can resist.

—Aminata Ceesay, Benjamin Goldsmith, and Mira Sickinger





Artwork: Julianna McCaffrey

# Sex Education at the Statehouse

Madeline Caruso

Content warning: mentions of sexual assault

Leaving the Massachusetts State House and emerging into the warmth of early June, I hoped Margaret Sanger would be proud of me. Sanger, known as the unofficial founder of Planned Parenthood, was integral to the early reproductive rights movement. I, on the other hand, had just finished testifying before the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Education to push for a bill called the Healthy Youth Act (HYA). This act would mandate that schools that choose to teach sex education do so in a way that was medically accurate, age appropriate, and comprehensive. Before hearing what others had to say about the bill, I had believed government-regulated sex education in schools to be a fairly inoffensive idea. That day, not only did I learn that there were valid reasons someone could disagree with the HYA, but I also got to see civic discourse in action. I learned valuable lessons about civic discourse within state government and about how and why people disagree. Although it is not, and



has never been, easy to influence the government, civic discourse and involvement in politics are just as important today in the U.S. as they were when the framers wrote the Constitution.

To fully understand the context of my testimony, it is first necessary to understand what civic discourse is. The idea is hard to pin down—it comes in a number of forms, and it is somewhat easier to identify than to define. Most people who have heard the term “civic discourse” used in context know intuitively that while arguing over which of two football teams is better is not generally considered civic discourse, arguing over whether football players should be allowed to kneel during the national anthem (think Colin Kaepernick) is. Not every instance is so clear, however. Would two politicians from different parties putting aside their differences and having dinner together count as civic discourse? What about everyone at the dinner table nodding in agreement after your cousin makes a joke about the latest controversial law to be highlighted by the

meaning it happens when people are invested in what the government does; and “counsel,” or an attempt to expose oneself and others to new ideas to come to a stronger conclusion.

Cooper further asserts that “modes of civic discourse enable citizens to answer the timeless and urgent call of democracy: ‘We have a problem. We need to talk about it’” (158). Civic discourse, as such, is any attempt, especially by members of a democracy, to solve a significant problem among themselves. Such attempts are significant because the solution directly or indirectly affects the life, liberty, or pursuit of happiness of people engaging in, or who are subjects of, civic discourse. Our politicians are engaging in civic discourse only if their conversation involves an important issue. The dinner table joke might be civic discourse, but this would be cemented if a larger conversation were to stem from it.

No mode of civic discourse is easy, and each comes with pros and cons. A major con of my chosen mode was uncertainty. People

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## “Intuition, it seems, is not sufficient to fully understand the breadth of civic discourse.”

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national news? Intuition, it seems, is not sufficient to fully understand the breadth of civic discourse.

David Cooper suggests in his essay “Is Civic Discourse Still Alive?” that the term can be defined simply as “collective democratic counsel.” “Collective,” meaning there are multiple people involved; “democratic,”

from Planned Parenthood had met with me a few times and had helped me write my testimony, but I was mostly in the dark about what the day would actually be like. This fact didn’t fully hit me until I was on the subway, in my power pants (gray plaid slacks), oversized purse in hand. Hoping it would quell my nervousness, I pulled out my testimony.

I had written and rewritten the page-and-a-half-long document more times than I could count; my heart, my soul, and the accrued knowledge from six years of writing classes were on this paper.

Finally, after a bus ride, a train ride, and a walk to 24 Beacon Street, I arrived at the State House. I would prefer not to mention the three separate times I got lost trying to find room A-1, but I somehow ended up there. As I walked into the room, I was confronted with ten long benches sitting opposite a sprawling desk-like structure where the members of the committee and their staffers peered out at everyone else. Despite my difficulties finding the room, I managed to snag a seat on a bench. Most of the general public in attendance ended up sitting on the floor or standing, a sad way to watch people talk for seven hours.

Seven hours of watching people talk to themselves was indeed what it felt like, and it didn’t help that all I’d eaten that day was cereal and a granola bar. I think at some point during hour four or five I shifted to a different plane of existence. I was fascinated because it was all new to me, but I was not sure I’d want to do it day in and day out like the members of the committee did. There wasn’t much back-and-forth, either—Chairman Lewis or Chairwoman Peisch would call a few people from a list to come testify; then they would sit at the desk, speak for a few minutes, and go back to their original seats. Occasionally, one of the politicians would ask a question, usually about the language or logistics of a bill, but that was the extent of the conversations. The HYA was the last bill to be addressed, and I was one of the first people called to testify.

Hoping no one would take my seat on the bench, I made my way to the table with the microphones alongside three or four girls around my age who were also in support of the HYA.

After the girl to the left of me spoke, it was my turn. My testimony poured out of my mouth as if on autopilot—thankfully, without a hitch. The committee declined the opportunity to ask questions, so I listened to the remaining testimonies in my group. Then it was over. I felt like a drop in the ocean, now certain that my story wasn’t important enough to sway their opinions. People much older and more experienced than I testified, and that amplified the feeling. It was only when the opposition started to chime in that I realized why I was there. The HYA was the only act of the entire day that had opponents. I had been warned about one of them, the Massachusetts Family Institute (MFI). It’s a powerful organization, notorious for shutting down sex education legislation on the grounds that it will poison children’s minds—the kind of fearmongering that should give you a good idea of how little ground they actually have to stand on. Most people support having sex education taught in schools (Kaiser), but those who make up the MFI are a vocal minority. Called to testify were a middle-aged man, an older woman, and a teenage girl. I’ll always remember what this girl said. She was afraid of sex education because she believed, or had been told, that it led people to rape. This was the world she would have to live in for the rest of her life, and she didn’t want to have to constantly be afraid that she would be sexually assaulted. Immediately I felt bad for her. Sex education does not cause rape; in fact, it de-

lays sexual activity in most young people and helps them form a better understanding of consensual relationships (Santelli). I wanted to scream at her that one in five women in the United States is raped and that the future she was so afraid of was what many women experienced today (Black 18). I couldn't engage her, though, and for the moment that was probably a good thing. The hearing was coming to a close, finally, and I was ready to eat some actual food.

Not everyone who testified against the HYA was as misinformed as that girl. A lot of people were concerned about the government getting to decide what was taught

most memorable part of the day, my showing up and adding to the number of people who came in support of the HYA was in part why the bill recently ended up getting passed. Sometimes politicians just need to see that enough people will support them if they stick their necks out in support of a controversial issue.

Fundamentally, I appreciate the system that props up this form of civic discourse. On the surface, everyone gets heard, anyone can attend, the discourse is respectful, and everyone gets the same opportunity to speak. Without hearings, there would be little direct input from the population at large with

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## "The value of civic discourse is not in getting satisfaction, but in seeking the truth through formulating and reformulating ideas."

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about sex education in schools. Some didn't like the language in the curriculum because they felt that it romanticized sex. More felt it should be the parents' role to teach their children about sexuality. I disagree to varying degrees with those ideas, but they're valuable to me now because through them I've been confronted with views that are different from mine. If I were more moderate, those testimonies might have changed my mind. This also gave me some clarity about the importance of my testimony. It's not usually possible to change someone's mind on such a polarizing topic, but the value of civic discourse sometimes lies not in how it can reverse ideas, but in how it can deepen them. Also, although my testimony and what I said exactly might not have been the

regard to legislation. In those seven hours, almost every bill had informed, passionate people speaking on its behalf. In those ways, it is ethical, especially when considering the direct conversations between politicians and people testifying. Committee members were always attentive and never attacked anyone's testimony. They never pushed back, either, though. When that girl said that sex education led to rape, no committee member disagreed with her, though that statement was untrue. No committee member ever disagreed with anyone unless it involved something they could point to in the text of the legislation. I don't believe it to be ethical to let someone go on with their life without at least trying to correct misinformation, to let that person spread misinformation to other people.

This system simply doesn't allow for push-back of any kind except through a reference to the language of the bill. Even superficial elements, such as the fact that the committee members were far away from the individuals testifying and the fact that some people who testified had been standing for hours prior, made it impossible to have an actual discussion between two people. The other issue is lack of efficiency. I had to be there the whole day, because no one knew at exactly what time we would get to the HYA. This creates a concentration of testimony from people who advocate for a living and people like me who don't have regular jobs. Some might say that means the people who show up are those who care the most, but I know that isn't true. Plenty of my friends have much more of a personal stake in this issue than I do but couldn't attend the hearing for various reasons.

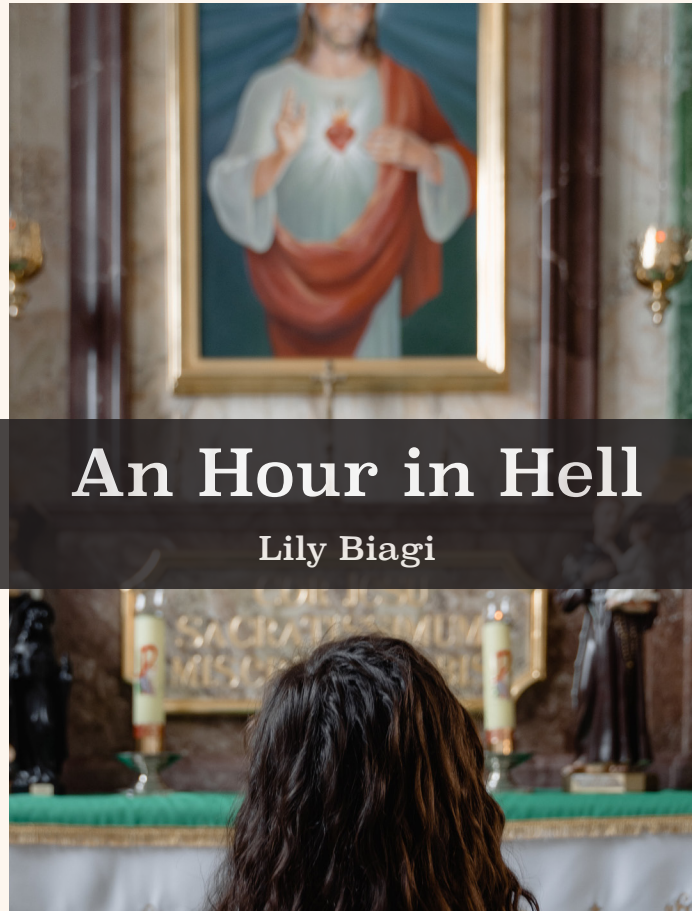
The memory of June 3, 2019 brings up mixed emotions for me. I remember leaving feeling grateful to be able to get up and walk around. I knew I was lucky to live under a government that allowed me to speak directly to my legislators, but I felt weighed down with new knowledge of which parts of the system should be improved. Testifying at the State House was definitely the longest and most tiring form of civic discourse I'd ever participated in, but it was an experience I'll never forget. Civic discourse isn't always satisfying. It's not always like the debates on TV where two non-experts yell at each other for a digestible amount of time. This experience encouraged me to seek a deeper understanding of important issues, regardless of whether people's minds are changed or not. The value of civic discourse is not

in getting satisfaction, but in seeking the truth through formulating and reformulating ideas. Whether that comes in the form of having debates about kneeling during the national anthem or in the form of testifying at an establishment of local government is up to you—all that matters is what you and the people around you get from it.

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# An Hour in Hell

Lily Biagi

**A**pril 2014—a month before our Confirmation. Soon, eight years of religious education classes would culminate in the final sacrament of initiation: We’d finally be considered adults in the Catholic Church. Michael and I sat huddled around my phone, debating which dress I should wear for the service. He insists I wear the sleeveless periwinkle skater dress with ruffles on the skirt because I look “just too fabulous” in it and “couldn’t pos-

sibly wear anything else.”

Michael nudges me as our two seminarian teachers walk into the room. I immediately slip my phone into my pocket and sit up straight in my chair. The tall, blond, Communion-wafer-thin one writes “The Holy Sacrament of Marriage” on the chalkboard, while the short, stout one with dark hair begins today’s lesson.

“Good evening class. Today we will be discussing the Holy Sacrament of Marriage and

how God envisioned it. We can also discuss the modern deviants of God’s plan at the end if we have time.” My eyes dart to Michael, hoping to see if he’s as perplexed as I am. He’s looking straight ahead, hyper-focused on the lesson. I notice he’s wearing a new hot pink polo shirt. It looks striking against his pale, freckled skin. The rest of the class is listening to the short seminarian just as intently.

The tall one steps next to his fellow teacher and rests his hand on his shoulder. “Shall we read what Jesus has to say about marriage?” The short one looks up into his eyes for a few long seconds, transfixed by those baby blue sparklers, and then nods his head slowly. The tall one reaches for a Bible on the desk, opens it, and begins to read. The short one stares at the tall one’s lips as he forms the words, “Marriage is between a man and a woman.”

“Did you hear that scriptural students?” The tall one’s voice startles the short one, breaking his almost lustful trance. I stare a moment longer, my forehead wrinkling. The tall one raises his voice even louder: “Marriage can only be between a MAN and a WOMAN!”

The short one’s mouth turns up at the edges as he declares, “Repeat after him students: Marriage is between a man and a woman!” My eyes zigzag frantically around the room as everyone’s mouths open, and the words come tumbling out. My jaw remains clenched the entire recitation. I turn to Michael, and my cheeks burn and tingle as I see his head turned down towards the desk.

Michael, the boy I had met in Madame Payton’s preschool class at this very church, Saint James, years ago. Michael, the boy I had attended Religious Education classes with every year since. Michael, my slam poetry partner for the eighth-grade slam. Michael,

the boy my dad said looked like a leprechaun with his red curly hair, green eyes, and pale freckled skin. Michael, the boy who some kids teased for being “weird” or “different.” Michael, the boy who some parents called “eccentric” or even “flamboyant.” But to me, he was just Michael: my sweet, boisterous, hilarious friend.

The tall seminarian chimes in, “NOWHERE in the Bible does it say that marriage can be between a man and another man, or a woman and another woman. Gay marriage devalues the Holy Sacrament of Marriage.”

The short one nods his head passionately. “Gays are deviants of God’s plan. They chose to sin, and therefore end up in Hell.”

His disgusting words scrape the insides of my stomach before landing at its pit. Every moral lesson I had learned from the Catholic Church—to love thy neighbor, to treat everyone with respect, that God forgives our sins—were dimmed into obscurity by the hateful black cloud of the lesson they had just preached. If Catholics believed what I had just been told, I no longer wanted to be Catholic.

I turn to Michael, and my heart shatters as I see his tear-streaked face. His damp eyes plead with me: Help. I need to get out of here. I want to stand up and scream, “Stop talking you stupid hypocrites! You don’t know anything!”

But I’m paralyzed, mouth sealed shut, butt nailed to my seat like Jesus nailed to the cross. Jesus was a martyr; I’m a coward. All I can do is reach my hand out and grab Michael’s. If the seminarians were right and Michael would be stuck in Hell for eternity, then I can endure this Hell-on-Earth with him for another half hour.

Layout by Mira Sickinger. Photography by Mart Productions.



## “Say Their Names”

Andrew Parker Schiffer

“*SAY HER NAME!*”

Though I never met the woman leading the chants, I could hear the hurt in her weary voice. Her pleas for peace rose above the ground on which we walked and hovered over us for the remainder of our march. The voice above filled the silence and provided direction for newcomers in need of a guiding light. We met in my old high school’s parking lot. Hundreds of us gathered to protest the never-ending issue of police brutality in our country with so many others. This was my first taste of the Black Lives Matter movement. As it was my first protest, I was unsure of what to do with my gaze or whom to turn to for answers until I heard her voice. Her call silenced my inner thoughts, garnered my full attention, and put me in check. This wasn’t going to be a typical summer afternoon activity; we weren’t celebrating anything. This was a Black woman in pain, grieving the life of Breonna Taylor and fearful of the police. Get with the program or get out; the high school reunion could wait.

Call and response is a learned behavior that takes little practice and requires little thought. Initially, I hesitated to respond or even address her sentiment of remembrance. She demanded the tiniest fraction of what we could give, not money, power, or even recognition. Still, I was a closeted ally, afraid of being perceived as just another white person promising to fight for this woman and Breonna Taylor. The other protesters and I were a block away from the parking lot, and the concrete had yet to change colors. The question “What impact will I have?” rang in my head, causing all types of frustration. Showing up and speaking out are two entirely different entities, but in my case, they went hand-in-hand, and I decided then to use my voice to support Breonna Taylor, the focus of a groundswell of pain from Lexington, KY. At that point, I had drawn on a blank poster board, gathered some peers and

# SAY THEIR NAMES  
ERIC GARNER • JOHN CRAWFORD • MICHAEL BROWN  
EZELL FORD • DANTE PARKER • MICHELLE CUSS  
EAUX • LAQUAN MCDONALD • TANISHA ANDERSON • AKAI GURLEY • TAMIR RICE • RUMAIN BRISBON • JERAME REID • GEORGE MANN • MATTHEW AJIBADE • FRANK SMART • NATASHA MCKENNA • TONY ROBINSON...

Layout by Cameron Macaulay. Photograph by Tim Demell. CC BY-NC 2.0. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sheffim/49989103906>.





showed up, marched a couple of blocks, and lifted my voice. But what had I really done?

The ink from the permanent marker on my poster had not dried before I felt overwhelmed. I had trouble pacing myself with the other protesters, childishly stepping on the heels of those in front of me and standing in the way of those behind. The idea of turning around crossed my mind more than a few times, but the woman's voice kept my focus. I had to step outside of myself to realize that the Black community was suffering—she was suffering—and I needed to be there to show my support. A sign held up by a woman next to me read, “If you’re not with us, you’re against us.” My heartbeat steadied, realizing then that I was with the protesters; I was on the right side of history. Her sign, clad with scarlet red paint, reflected the look of dried blood. I believe that was her intention. This wasn’t arts and crafts to her. I lowered my sign from my extended reach and reread my misshapen handwriting: “JUSTICE FOR GEORGE.” We were six blocks into the march, six blocks into my first real sense of Black Lives Matter, and I had almost forgotten what led me there in

the first place. My fingers traced my poorly written plea at a stoplight, and the light from the crossing signal bounced off of my glossed poster. The previous evening, three of the four officers involved were in custody, but the fourth, Derek Chauvin, remained at-large. I scoffed at the thought of Chauvin evading apprehension, and I was transported back to that fateful day in May.

“*SAY HIS NAME!*”

I’d like to say that it all started on May 25th, 2020, when George Floyd was murdered by police sworn to protect him, but that is not the case. I’d like to say that this tragedy was my call to action, the signal of distress that awoke me from the haze of ambivalence, but it did not. George Floyd’s death at the time was, to me, another name added to the list of Black people killed by police in our country. I watched George Floyd’s murder unfold from the comfort of safety, the comfort of being white in America, but a seed of guilt was planted. My eyes glossed over from screen-staring, watching the curbside execution unfold repeatedly—and I kept scrolling. It’s excruciatingly painful now to look back on that moment and not want to scream and shake myself from the grasp of my negligence. To other white people in my community, my lack of compassion and care might not have signaled anything alarming

Photograph by Wikipedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Black\\_Lives\\_Matter\\_protest.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Black_Lives_Matter_protest.jpg).

or noteworthy. But now I see that version of me for what it was: silent and ignorant. Nothing had changed in me since learning about the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and many others. I had done nothing to change anything, less than the bare minimum. How many murders would it take for me to finally speak out against it or just say anything at all?

On May 29th, my family and I gathered to watch our mayor, Keisha Lance Bottoms, speak at a press conference and condemn the prior three days of violence, rioting, and looting. Only then did I finally wake up. She was eloquent, direct, and furious about the violence while still encouraging the peaceful protestors to use their voices. She spoke about the benefits of peaceful protesting and voting, two of the best ways to send a message without violence. Up until this point, I had taken a vow of ignorance and ambivalence, siding with conflict aversion instead of action. It was the more comfortable approach; because it didn’t directly affect me, I believed I should stay out of the way. But the protests had reached my hometown of Atlanta, and I knew then that it was now or never. Standing with our Black community was no longer a choice. It was mandatory. What I was seeing before me was real change, and I could no longer look the other way. That same night, I learned about a peaceful protest scheduled for that Sunday, and I signed my name to be there.

“*SAY THEIR NAMES!*”

As the Governor’s Mansion and Atlanta Police came into view, our steps became heavier and our voices softer. The police

weren’t there to incite fear, wore no extra protection from my perspective, and assumed the position of traffic control officers; this was entirely different from the narrative pushed on television. It was clear they understood our message—that Black Lives Matter—and were trying to do their part by assisting us. Once we were engulfed by the shadow of the Governor’s Mansion, the marchers in front began to kneel on the concrete, as instructed by the march organizers. Soon enough, we all knelt. We were informed of a moment of silence that would take place; 8 minutes and 46 seconds to honor the life of George Floyd and spotlight the police brutality that took that life. As we were in the middle of a crowded public road, this moment of silence sounded different than others. One lane of cars drove past, some opting to slow down and take videos or pictures of our group. It was unfortunate that the road remained open, but it was also a reminder of what it probably sounded like when George Floyd had a knee on his neck.

Some beside me started praying; some decided to lie down entirely and give themselves to the moment. Some were crying, some had a fist in the air, and others, both. With every face my eyes landed on, a piece of my heart chipped away. The guilt that began as a seed-





ling had grown into a towering, magnificent force, growing larger with every new face that came into view. As the minutes went by, I continued to observe my fellow marchers, focusing on those who were most emotional. I saw hurt, pain, suffering, and animosity toward the police and the man who lives across the street. Finally, I looked inward. I closed my eyes, my mind in panic mode, a new thought with every beat of my heart. After a few deep breaths, I settled on my being there and the accompanying feeling of guilt. Quickly the pressure mounted as I began to sweat, and not because of the summer heat.

I felt responsible for the pain and suffering that my Black brethren endure. Derek Chauvin and I share one thing in common: the color of our skin. I felt my heart sink deeper into my chest, my thoughts and emotions becoming one. I shook my head, disgusted by the thought of Chauvin and I in the same sentence, the same room, or even the same race. Having realized that he and I are inherently different people, I moved on, not wasting a second longer of this moment of respect for George Floyd. The moment of silence had morphed into a moment of truth.

I spent the remaining minutes road-mapping my plans moving forward, asking how could I better support Black people in my community. In Georgia, voter suppression is synonymous with Governor Brian Kemp, whose front porch was a stone's throw from our protest. In the 2018 Gubernatorial Race, Kemp was both the Secretary of State and the Republican candidate for Governor of Georgia, and he used his position of power to actively suppress Georgia voters, closing polling locations in predominantly Black neighborhoods and purging Black citizens

from voter rolls. One report notes that “214 precinct closures in Georgia since 2012,” when Kemp became the Secretary of State, “often occurred in counties with high poverty rates and significant African American populations” (Niesse). He is one of many who put up hurdles for thousands of Black voters wanting to use their voices.

We're taught at an early age that the right to vote is one of our greatest civil liberties, as it is the only way to determine who speaks on our behalf from a lawmaking perspective; so I concluded that it was my responsibility to encourage others to vote as well. It was time to show up, speak out, and lift up other voters. No timer rang, and no alarm clock buzzed at the conclusion of the moment of silence. Chants started to emerge quietly, growing from a soft hum to conversation level to exclamation. We took a collective pause to remember George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and those who walked before them, and rose from that pain to collectively fight for their lives, for our lives. A Black student donning a football jersey of my high school's rival took the megaphone, quieted the crowd, and began to speak about the importance of using our voices and our vote for positive change. He, a student whom I did not know, had the courage to take the megaphone and to voice his thoughts for the world to hear. This was the affirmation that I needed; I can't think of anything or anyone more deserving of such a platform. He brought to light the voter suppression of the 2018 Gubernatorial election that awarded the man across the street his seat, as we were seeing his heart open up for us in real time. He spoke of the hundreds of thousands of new voters that would be using their voices for the first time in November,

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Opposite page: Photograph by Anthony Quintano, CC BY 2.0, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/quintanomedial/49984521671>.

and I realized then, through his words, that my plan to encourage my peers to vote could work. Lastly, he spoke about encouragement, about using this moment and movement as fuel to spark real, positive change. He no longer seemed to be just another kid from another high school, he was someone from the Black community, someone who was suffering. The childish nature of our high school rivalry became trivial for me, as I now had more respect for him than most of my own former classmates.

These moments led me to become an advocate for voting in a state that has faced some of the worst voter suppression in our country during the 2020 election. I began posting bi-weekly to my social media accounts about polling locations and voting opportunities in Georgia. I urged some of my closest friends to register to vote. Some have already cast their ballots. Days after our march, Rayshard Brooks was killed during a confrontation with Atlanta Police. As the nation's gaze turned to Atlanta, I looked within myself to see if anything had really changed. I educated myself on who he was, who his family is, and who they are supporting for office, as that speaks to the candidates who have earned the respect of his family.

As we marched back, the chants echoed into the night, and they still echo in my brain today. The only way to truly seek real, positive change is to never forget their names. Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Rayshard Brooks will live on—not just for the next year, but for decades into the future. The next day, as I browsed social media, my thumb stopped on a video of George Floyd's daughter, Gianna. “Daddy changed the world,” she said, and her sentiment

still sticks with me almost five months later (Ritschel). If not for her father, I would not have attended that march, promoted voter registration to my peers, or even voted in this year's election, and I am not alone in that. The activists who have worked tirelessly to educate the world about the wrongful deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks have reminded us of the need to reform our policing system and voting systems entirely. Before I departed from the parking lot, I grasped my rolled-up poster, unfurling and straightening it in the backseat of my car. In the months since, the words “JUSTICE FOR GEORGE” look a bit more tattered than when they first saw daylight, but the message remains the same. I glance at the poster every time I open my car door, refusing to let myself forget the message and that march. I hope you don't either.

### “SAV THEIR NAMES!”

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# Starve to Death

Rosalyn Impink

If you know nothing else about Armenians, know us for our love of food. I remember an early episode of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* when Mary and company are seated at an awards event with an Armenian man waiting for the next party. Someone remarks that he's a little early, to which he replies, "Listen, if you don't come early to an Armenian wedding, you can starve to death" (Rodgers). I can laugh because it's true—this is a lesson all Armenians learn by necessity at a young age. But the phrase "starve to death" has always been a painful remark for

the Armenian community. The phrase is so deeply ingrained in us—not just in Armenian history, but the darkest corners of our very sense of being.

Just about every Armenian family has their genocide story. These are impossible tales of strength, survival, and miracles to explain how their ancestors fought to escape slaughter by genocide as perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire in the early years of the 20th century. Unlike most Armenians, though, my story starts not in the old country, but in Massachusetts, 1909. My Armenian-

born great-great-grandparents brought their son Oscar back from Boston to visit their homeland, and a second son, John, was born some months after. In a few years, Oscar's father went back to America with the intent that the rest of the family would follow. The timing couldn't be worse as the Ottoman Turks locked the borders down, trapping Oscar, John, and their mother Helen in the city of Harput. At the same time, millions of Armenians were rounded up across the Caucasus to be marched to their deaths in the desert. With what can only be

described as an insane amount of luck and courage, Helen was able to talk her way out of the firing line and escape with her boys. They spent the next thirteen years fighting their way back to the states and their father.

I know all this because Oscar, my great-grandfather, sat down for an Armenian genocide oral history project with a Boston University student in 1975. In this recording, Oscar, age 66, reflects on the close calls and near-death experiences of his youth (Amirian). He witnessed atrocities and acts of heroism. He discusses being hidden in a

Layout by Jeanette Orlando.  
Photograph: Anonymous German Traveler.

barrel for days at a time to avoid being kidnapped by soldiers. His voice swells with pride when he boasts that a Turk would never take on an Armenian in a fight unless it was ten men against one. He spends a significant amount of time describing the food of the region. He saw cantaloupes grown in the mountains larger than watermelons, and watermelons that

weighed 40 or 50 pounds. He tasted apricots so plump and juicy that no apricot since had been able to compare. But he also recalls long, hard winters when nothing grew, and no trade was allowed in. His

family shared a single loaf of bread a day if they could find it, and much of that was doled out to orphans knocking on the door of Helen, their varjabed (teacher), looking for a morsel to eat. “The main thing in our mind was to find food; that was the only thought in our mind, nothing else,” Oscar says. “All we did was plod the land for food.” The starvation went on for years in fluctuating degrees, leaving thousands dead, and the rest sickly and malnourished.

Eventually the family was finally reunited in Medford, Massachusetts. And just like that, life snapped back to normal—“it all worked out very nicely,” he said. The boys went to school, worked, married Armenian girls, had kids of their own, and were living the American dream. To look at Oscar in

photos from the 1940s and 1950s—jovial, round, a proud father and business owner—not a soul could guess that this man had spent his childhood running from certain death. But the traces of a hungry, skinny boy are still visible. He earned an honorable mention in a *Boston Traveler* contest for a short story he wrote about a young orphan who dies

of thirst amid a fast. Nothing went to waste in his home. Meals were meant to be shared with as many people as possible: Cousins, nieces, nephews, and friends beat a path to his door for weekly dinners. His children learned

to prepare the traditional Armenian dishes: kufta, losh kebab, manti, lamajun, yalanchi, and lavash. Oscar would ask, “Do you eat to live or live to eat?” For him, it seems, the answer would forever be both.

Oscar talks about his experiences almost nonchalantly 50 years after the fact, never revealing how the whiplash of transitioning from a war-torn, decimated country to a normal American existence affected him and millions of other Armenians. In 1915, there was hardly a single country in the world that intervened on behalf of the Armenians to stop the genocide and end the desolation in the homeland. As a result, millions were murdered, and many more died of hunger. This cycle has continued over and over again. The Nazis later deliberately starved prisoners in



Oscar and John in Massachusetts, 1959

German concentration camps. The Rwandan genocide in 1994 destroyed the nation's crops and caused thousands to go hungry for years (Borgen Project). Even more jarring, however, is the presence of hunger in nations across the world in this day and age, regardless of war or genocide. An estimated 821 million people suffered from starvation in 2018 (United Nations). Considering the advancements society has made over the past several decades, this is a shameful statistic. We have the technology ready and at our disposal to bring water to villages, increase our crop yields tenfold through hydroponic growing, and genetically modify seeds for optimization in different climates and soils. We're perfecting shipping and distribution management, allowing us to move supplies faster and cheaper than ever. We can digitally connect across oceans and tundra to pinpoint where the need is and how we can fill it. So why haven't we?

The world is reckoning with a global pandemic at a time of outrageous wealth inequality. Now more than ever, food must be treated as a human right. Hunger is a bar-

rier to mobility, good health, employment, schooling, wealth, and stability, all of which hurt the larger society. Instead of addressing hunger as a moral failing or an insurmountable problem, we must look at it as the gateway to ameliorating dozens of other social ills. There are hurdles to be overcome, including government corruption, climate change, and interstate conflict. We need a collective effort and commitment of nations to build the infrastructure and policy that will allow not just their citizens, but people everywhere, to have access to sustainable, healthy diets that provide the sustenance necessary to be productive, thriving members of society. Until that moment, governments on every continent should be ashamed that one child, one parent, one senior is going to bed hungry. Not a single person should suffer like my great-grandfather did in 1915. If we come together with willful determination—not as many nations, but as one world—then someday, there will be a generation that does not know the phrase “starve to death.”

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Oscar (left) and John, ages 4 and 3, in the Armenian city of Harput

Photographs courtesy of author.



## R E S I L I E N C E

Resilience. A word found in the character traits vocabulary list of middle schoolers everywhere. A word that some of us are likely tired of hearing. Yet it remains relevant and inspiring when witnessed. Resilience happens after the fact, after trauma. It demonstrates a willingness to grow in response to hardship, to face adversity, recover, and learn something along the way.

Looking back, especially as a bit of a pessimist, it is easy to get bogged down by all the hate, violence, and suffering we see around us. Just this past year has been traumatizing. The COVID-19 pandemic alone is responsible

for the anxiety, isolation, and loneliness of so many. There have been countless devastating acts of hate in the past year, and politics feel like a high stakes soap opera.

Despite all of this, a year is too long to experience no growth, no development of character. We have a hard time believing there is anyone who hasn't shown at least a thread of resilience during the course of the last year. To have learned nothing new is impossible. Those of us who are students are learning to learn in new ways. People have learned to fight injustices more effectively across physical distances via the Internet and social media. Our grandparents have

learned how to use Zoom and FaceTime, something they never would have even tried to do if not for COVID-19. More and more churches are beginning and continuing to stream services, a move that has been historically resisted. After years of begging, class sizes in elementary schools are finally smaller. Large groups of people are considering universal basic income—people who would have laughed at the notion previously. Public health is viewed differently. Public health policy and promotion is *better*. Not adapting to the situation was not a choice.

The predisposition for resilience is rooted in genetics but cultivated through situational encounters. Resilience has become a part of the human experience, ingrained in us through millennia of natural selection. Without it, humanity likely wouldn't have made it this far. So, resilience isn't unique. We see the same capacity for resilience in ourselves. Hearing others' stories reminds and encourages us to stand up and brush the dirt off our own knees when we fall down, too.

This past year has given everyone the opportunity to be resilient. We hope the following pieces will showcase the capacity for resilience within yourself and encourage you to continue learning and growing despite current hardships.

Guiv Lederer's "My Server, My People" describes finding community despite the circumstances created by COVID-19. Through heartfelt and personal descriptions of the members of this community, and the atmosphere within it, we can see the author and his friends create something meaningful that helped them get through the most isolating days of the lockdown.

David Harvey's "Comfortably Hidden" discusses the societal shift away from in-person interactions to virtual ones, and the way that the pandemic has only exacerbated this shift. Harvey encourages us to make a point of building real-world relationships despite the comfort of maintaining the virtual status quo.

"Fight or Flight: The Biology of an Anxiety Attack" by Alesandra "Sasha" Temerte depicts the reality of anxiety. On a biological and mental level, anxiety attacks require a unique kind of endurance. Temerte describes the struggle of not being able to take the wheel, and simply having to wait for the fog to pass.

"The Day I Left" by Nidaa Aljabbarin and "Arrowhead" by Ibraheem Abdi are part of a collection of poems created by the Narratio Fellows for a project called Intertwined Journeys. These pieces were all authored by young refugees who now live in the Syracuse area. Inspired by specific objects, each of these poems reflects on past experiences and identity, touching on themes of war and family.

In Christian Abdo's "No Cancer," we're told the story of a group of friends coming together to support one of their own who is facing serious adversity. Sometimes the hardships faced by one person can reach others, and it is important to offer support, and endure with them.

Again, right now, the world is in a collective state of resilience. We hope these pieces inspire you to be resilient for yourself, for others, and with others. And, we hope you gain a larger appreciation for the subtle resilience this year has brought out in all of us.

—Lydia Engel and Jeanette Orlando

Layout by Jeanette Orlando. Photograph by Julianna Markus.

Bad Newz Kennels

# text-channel

# text-channel

# genetic

# bark

Voice Channel

Duo

Best Team

Nite Time

Big Hair

Music

ONLY

BNK Starters

Dowgz

41

Minecraft

!

AFK

Guiv #8518

# My Server, My People

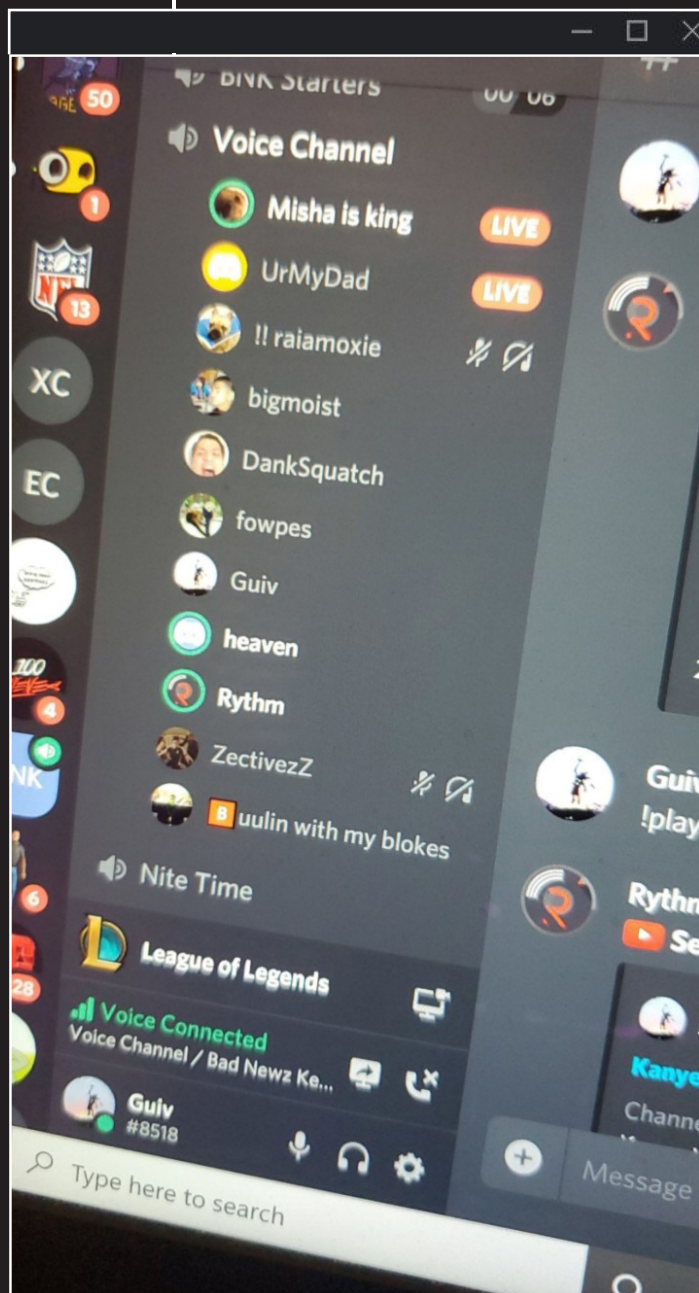
Guiv Lederer

"Community" is such a broad term. It can sometimes feel impossible to define. You will never truly know the whole story about a community unless you are a part of it. While there are many communities that I appear to be a part of, I want to share a story of one that may not be so obvious. This community is a simple one—a fleeting one. It only existed for a few weeks, but what a special couple of weeks they were. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that came with it made for an unprecedented time for everyone. I remember watching the NFL draft in April with my family more than a month into the nationwide lockdown. When Chief Medical Advisor Anthony Fauci made a speech before the draft, my younger brother made an astute observation, pointing out the overuse of the word "unprecedented." I realized he was right. Everyone seemed to be using that word to describe what was going on, and we hated it. It became like a cliché only the two of us noticed. Of course, it is hard to use any other word to describe what occurred, what is still occurring. I know many people who struggled, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Fortunately, I was able to form my own little community to help me get through the tough times—a community that could only exist in those specific circumstances.

At its inception, Discord was a counterpart to Skype and TeamSpeak, used for remote voice communication while playing video games. My brother and I were early users, hopping onto Discord in its beta stage. Skype was fine, but it was never optimized for gaming. TeamSpeak was meant for gaming, but you had to pay a fee. Discord was an amazing free alternative that combined the best parts of both. You can call your friends, just like Skype, but the main draw of Discord is its servers. You can create a server and invite whoever you want to it, and you can even customize the servers to your liking. Discord has come so far that it has essentially become its own social media platform even though it started as a remote voice communication service for gaming. Large servers popped up with millions of members. These servers have leaders, moderators, and administrators, and you can work your way up the ladder in servers that matter to you. In fact, they are no longer known as servers—they are now referred to as Discord "communities." Still, not all Discord communities are massive: I have a small Discord community with a small group of friends, some of whom I only know online.

The COVID-19 lockdown created the perfect reason for people to turn to gaming as something to fight through the boredom and loneliness of being in isolation. Discord is the perfect remedy. Not only do you have friends to talk to on Discord, but you





have options on how you want to spend your time on the Internet together. For weeks during the beginning of the lockdown, there were people logged onto the server at all times. As soon as I would wake up, I would log on. It truly felt like I was never alone. It was like living with a bunch of roommates. I read a new article every day about how mental health has been adversely affected by pandemic isolation. I can thank Discord for saving me from that.

This picture was taken at 10:50 p.m. on March 19, 2020, right in the middle of our little community's peak hours, between 9 p.m. and 12 a.m. We were usually finished with our online classes and homework by then, so we were free to log on. In the beginning, we played the same video games we always had: mostly Fornite and League of Legends. But playing the same games over and over again becomes stale, so we turned to playing games we had not touched in years. We played Minecraft, Rust, Unturned, Overwatch, and World of Warcraft, among others. It was a blast. But every night, my highlight was always League of Legends. I have been playing League of Legends since November 2013, and it has never gotten old. As a 5v5 competitive game, we were bound to be excluding someone if we had more than five people online, which we often did. But there's one catch: If you manage to get ten players together, a true game of 5v5 can be created within the group. There is nothing in the world more fun than that. Not only are all your teammates your friends, but all of your opponents are good friends as well. We usually managed to get ten people together maybe three or four times a year. It was happening daily during these "unprecedented" times.

We eventually got tired of the video games and found other ways to spend our time together online. We hosted an online chess tournament. We played online Pictionary and spent many nights helping each other with homework. Discord had also just added a feature that allowed game streaming, so we could always just watch a friend play if we needed something to do.

Beyond all of the specific things we did, simply having friends around meant so much to all of us. Many teenagers struggled during quarantine. According to Rima Himelstein, a pediatrician and adolescent medicine specialist, the COVID-19 quarantine was an "emotional tipping point" for many teens. This is not just a story about having fun and goofing off with my friends. We were a community that saved one another. I have friends who are depressed. I have friends who struggle. Even within the context of my small Discord community, I know there are people who are going through much more than me. fowpes is stuck inside with three other family members in a one bedroom apartment. !! raiaioxie has spent the entire lockdown with his mother, with whom he does not have the best relationship. Our community was not just a place to play video games. It saved us. It saved us from the depression and anxiety many teens faced during the pandemic.

And now, an introduction to our community:

**Misha is king (real name, Luca):** I met him playing Minecraft when I was nine or ten years old. We would Skype while playing Minecraft together. As it turns out, he lived in New York City as well, and we ended up becoming friends in real life. Today he is one of my closest friends.

**UrMyDad (real name, Josh):** Josh is another one of my closest friends in real life. We have been friends since he transferred to my school in the 6th grade.

**!! raiamoxie (real name, George):** George was my brother's elementary school best friend. As it turns out, he is a video game prodigy. He's good enough to be ranked in the top 100 North American League of Legends players, and he plays with professional players. His handle is a name that I gave him when we were very young. He is very forgetful and constantly forgets his login information, so he continually needs to make new accounts with slightly different spellings of Ralamoxie.

**bigmoist (real name, Inigo):** Another one of my best friends from sixth grade. He does not play many video games, but he always brings a positive energy to the call.

**DankSquatch (real name, Linus):** Linus is yet another best friend from sixth grade—there are many in our Discord who fit this criteria. He is ultra-competitive, and he credits me for teaching him a lot of the things he values today.

**fowpes (real name, Edmund):** Probably my best friend. There is always a cheer when he joins the server. He rarely finds time to play, but when he does he plays for hours on end. It is very frustrating. He has the most interesting sense of humor and everyone loves playing with him.

**Rythm:** Rythm is one of the coolest aspects of Discord. Rythm is actually a bot that will take commands if imputed into the chat. Rythm plays music to everyone on the server.

**ZectivezZ (real name, Damien):** No one really calls him Damien. He changes his handle every few weeks, and it is impossible to keep track of all the changes. He is mostly quiet, except for when my younger brother is playing. For whatever reason, they seem to despise each other, and they have an absolutely hilarious gaming rivalry. I have never met Damien.

**Buulin with my blokes (real name, Sean):** We have been friends since kindergarten. He is not one of my best friends, but he has always been one of my closest friends. Sean's handle's is constantly changing. He takes forum posts from the Internet and pastes them in as his username every few days. It usually makes no sense.

**Guiv (real name, Guiv):** Myself. I am the only person whose handle is the same as my actual name.

**heaven (real name, unknown, but he goes by Chip):** Everyone just calls him Heaven. He is from China but moved to Canada for school. Though he speaks very little English, he is one of the funniest people I have ever spoken to. I have never met him in real life, and I have no idea what he looks like.

These are just the people who were on the server at 10:50 p.m. on March 19, 2020. These are just a few of the people who made my quarantine so special. Together we turned a pretty bleak reality into memories we'll never forget.





# Comfortably Hidden

David Harvey

Intertext, Vol. 29 [2021], Art. 1

Delmar, New York is home to 8,292 people. It has been the place I call home since I arrived in St. Peter's Hospital over twenty years ago. Growing up in such a small community, everyone knew everybody. You couldn't even go jogging without crossing paths with multiple familiar faces. I remember my senior year when I left my house to go on a run and spent an hour and a half just talking with three dif-

ferent people instead of actually running. I spoke to Katherine Chirella about how her move into her new home on Oakwood went. She had been battling some inner-family issues, so I am happy I was able to be there for her. I also gave congratulations and discussed medical school with Sydney Klugman. I know how much she prepared for her MCAT and how excited she was to start her journey in the medical field. I was even able

to catch up with Mr. Maritato and learn how he and the family were doing. I hadn't seen my best friend Renato for some time; he, and the rest of the Maritatos, were vacationing.

No earbuds, no phone, no distractions. I could hold a real conversation, one with substance beyond a quick check-in, with anyone, wherever and whenever.

*Well, what the hell happened?*

Ask yourself: When is the last time you had a conversation like that with someone you don't consider a very close friend or family member? An interaction holding more than a simple "how are you?" An interaction driven by genuine emotion rather than your phone yearning to be taken out of your pocket and held?

Now don't get me wrong. We have technology in small-town America. I saw this

Layout by Ariel Samuel.  
Photograph by Hazhang Lai.



occurring with some folks walking around my town. Those with their heads fixated downwards on a screen while drowning out the world with headphones. *How can somebody just do that?* I watched them continue almost as if they were sleepwalking. In normal fashion, I flashed a smile their way as I walked by, but to no avail. They failed to recognize anything. I assured myself that that would never be me. It is absolutely impossible. There is no way I would jeopardize all of those chances to interact by gluing my eyes to my phone and hiding behind a set of earbuds.

*I ask again: What the hell happened?*

I am now a student at Syracuse University, a campus teeming with thousands of students, 22,850 to be exact. What a great position we are put in to expand our networks and interact with people from different backgrounds, countries, and lifestyles. Yet, I am curious as to why my social interactions diminished to a bare minimum only a couple of weeks into my freshman year. How can a place with triple the people, all around my age, provide less human connection? I look around during an average afternoon on campus; nearly every student has headphones on, is messing with their phone, carrying their computer, or a combination of the three. *I guess the times are changing, and I will have to adapt as well.* To this day, if you see me around campus, I will be breaking my cardinal sin. I never thought I could become that person engulfed in their technology, but here I am. Technology is trapping us, hiding us from each other in plain sight, and we let it happen with such ease.

In the last twenty years alone, our Inter-

net usage as a planet has gone up by 1,157% (“Key Internet”). You may not think that you are contributing to this, right? All of you guys are limiting your Internet usage? Well, I didn’t think I was contributing either, but my iPhone has done all of the data-tracking for me. Over a couple of months, my average daily screen time has been a whopping 7 hours and 15 minutes, with peaks on the weekends. According to a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average time for a student of my age is 7 hours and 38 minutes a day (Hicks 2). Hey, at least I’m under that; what a relief! To put that in perspective, after I have gotten my 8 hours of sleep, I have 16 hours left in my day. In turn, I then spend half of that time using just my phone, not including any computer, TV, or radio use. Unlike some, my phone is mainly used for entertainment purposes and honestly, it is just a time drain. I’m addicted to YouTube, Snapchat, and countless other social platforms. We all have this addiction. If I am not active, I might miss a trend, notification, or video. I know how hard it is to face the facts but humor me and check your own screen time right now. You’ll be met with an unpleasant surprise.

Yeah, it’s our addiction.

This increase is not seen in just places of entertainment like social media, gaming, and video streaming, but in business and education as well. The question is this: Why have we become so dependent? As a student, I want to focus on the educational impacts. I believe this begins with our youngest members of society: the children. According to Daphne Bavelier and her colleagues, all applications, whether it is video games, cell phones, or online learning, play



Photograph by Hazhang Lai.

a role in child development. Unsurprisingly, the effects of technology on development are extremely complex with numerous perspectives, leading neuroscientists and social psychologists to resort to qualitative analyses (Bavelier et al.). However, conjecture does not hold as much value as concrete numbers in the global eye. We are the net generation, with more advanced knowledge of technology than ever before, yet we continue to abuse it. We turn to it because we find it easy. We have grown up with it—adapted to it. It’s the comfortable blanket I’ve been sleeping under for twenty years. Now more than ever, children are being introduced to technology even younger. My cousin started kindergarten last year, and the most exciting part for him was not making friends, not beginning to learn, or not even messing around on the playground. He was ecstatic about receiving his own learning tablet.

Before this technology was etched into

society, it was a mere temptation. It has transcended brain function and behavior over time, challenging your visual and motor cortex (Bavelier et al.). The educational system had no choice but to embrace it because of its long-term potential. Studies were done, and the benefits were all there. They showed how an engaging, visual learning style helps with comprehension, how students retain more information from a website than a book, and how teachers and students were going to save countless hours on communicating and organizing when it comes to learning (Hicks 4). These notions have been hidden behind for way too long. These studies were done over ten years ago. Are we really that naive and scared to admit we have a problem?

People always ask, why bring this up now? If this was such an issue, why has it not been addressed before today? We are all facing a bigger concern right now, and that is COVID-19. This conversation has been addressed



countless times before but seems to have gotten lost ever since the virus struck. In light of COVID-19, our worldwide Internet usage has dramatically increased by 25%-30% (Branscombe). Though we have been given a new default, it is getting out of control. Since the start of the outbreak, our device usage has increased astronomically, spiking in only a 90-day period. The most alarming thing is that it affected people of all ages. Everyone. As most people know, Zoom has taken us by storm. In March of 2020 alone, video calls have increased by over 1,000%, changing our consistent Internet traffic patterns (Branscombe). I am a victim; I succumb to sitting in my house and staring at the same screen for hours. A day could go by and I would only see my roommates. That's it.

The entire world has gone online; it has been for eight months, and society has not even realized how reliant we have been on technology during these quarantining times. To attend work, you need the Internet. To attend class, you need the Internet. To feed traveling desires, you need the Internet. Even to interact with friends, you need the internet. COVID-19 has taken our world and shown us what our future will be if we continue this exponential Internet-use; people hiding behind their screens in the comfort of their own homes. More important, when in public, people now have another tool to distance themselves from everyone: a mask. Now, even a smile cannot be communicated to someone else.

The question isn't about now. I respect the efforts being made by governments to end the pandemic's horrid reign, even if we have to sacrifice social interactions. What worries me is what will happen once our



world reverts back to its so-called original form. Will our Internet usage see as dramatic a dip as we saw in the spike? Have we changed how dependent the human race will be on technology moving forward? I ask these questions because if we remain in our current trend, the Internet will surpass other means of education and business utilized before. It's been so easy to just sit behind a screen and live everyday life on the side. No need to get ready in the morning when you're waking up two minutes before a class or meeting, not even required to wear pants. Life has been comfortable, and somehow, without leaving the confines of your room, your social life is still booming more than ever. Social media usage has had 3.5 billion users during these troubled times, and the

number is still climbing (Branscombe). Anyone you could ever want to contact is only a couple of clicks or taps away. You may think you are becoming more connected, but the irony is you are disconnecting from people even further. The fallacy is in the means of connecting; technology is just a facade of real communication, providing you with only what the other person chooses to show or say through their screen. There is no intimacy in human-machine interactions. It is truly a beautiful thing when you really get to know someone. Online, you know what others want you to know, not who they are. They are shielded by this type of mediation. The comfort and security provided is a seduction like no other. This eight-month period has given countries the necessary systems/structures to make this online world work in all aspects of life, whether that is online dating, online food ordering, or online employment. So, what is stopping it from being implemented?

Now is the time to reevaluate our world's technology dependence. We have been given a glimpse of our future, and it is stealing us away from each other. I watched as Delmar diminished to another online society, separating those who were once so close. I encourage all of you; start a conversation with someone. Anyone. Maybe it won't be very deep, but there is satisfaction in talking with a person, in person, something a machine cannot replicate. Communication is between two people, and right now, both of you are too scared to approach each other without your protective screen. Not scared—frightened. Only one of you has to take the leap of faith, though. Once you have, you'd be surprised how easy the conversation flows.

You're not vulnerable in these situations; we're all human. You don't need technology to connect. We need to get back to being more comfortable together, not apart. This virtual community is enticing us to settle for these imitative relationships, and we need to overcome it before it's too late. Before we get too comfortable.

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Photograph by Hazhang Lai.

# Fight or Flight:

## The Biology of an Anxiety Attack

Alesandra “Sasha” Temerte

Content Warning: This piece contains graphic descriptions of an anxiety attack written in second person.

First, there is fog—it is always fog. As your mind swells with a million thoughts a second, you lose your words as soon as they come to you. Time seems to slow down and speed up at once, as your life grinds to a halt. Your brain pounds in pace with your heart—pulsing and pulsing. Still, the fog remains.

You are sixteen—there are so many papers to write and problems to solve that you have not slept in days. Your hands forget what it means to hold a pen. Your muscles weaken and your hands shake. Crumbled by pressure, you stare at the bio notes before you. You fail to find humor in the irony that you just learned that the parasympathetic system is an agent of calm, and the sympathetic system fuels panic. You’ve been memorizing the body for hours now, and when you glance at the clock in your room, it is already 10 p.m. The thought of the late night of work still ahead paralyzes you.

At this point, your own parasympathetic nervous system flees. You can no longer be saved by the slowing of your heartbeat, the gentle river of a mouth that is not dry, a body that knows there is no danger here. Instead, a signal is born in the cerebral cortex. It rushes up your brainstem, and now, the sympathetic

nervous system is wide awake and hungry. Searching for the invisible peril, your body betrays you. It kicks the doors of logic closed. It grabs the lever and cranks adrenaline into high gear. Now, all that is left is fight or flight.

Five minutes have passed. The frontal cortex fails, taking with it your final hope for reason. The system misfires—somewhere, a flaw in the program prevents an inhibitory response. The amygdala runs wild, finally loose and hyper and alarmed. Molecules of fear ravage through your blood. In the midbrain, pain flowers. The barricades shoot up—every wall on guard—as the periaqueductal gray roars to call for a defensive response. The limbic system of emotions wreaks havoc, and there’s no way to slow its army down. The hippocampus, thalamus, and brain stem are all on top alert. A simple glitch in the matrix has erupted into war.

Ten minutes have passed; it is at this point that symptoms peak. You wonder what it feels like not to hold the world on your shoulders. You worry about your best friend, the one who wishes she didn’t exist. You worry about your future, unsure of who you will become, whether you will be happy crunching numbers at a desk. You worry about the country, about what the choice in politicians

says about its people. You worry that you are a woman. No. You worry that you are just a *girl*. You worry that your body is weak. You worry that your knowledge and wisdom won’t save you against a gun or a man in a suit. You worry about your vulnerable heart. You worry that those you love might die or leave. A sob escapes you thinking about how small and fragile and helpless you feel in this dark and greedy world.

Eleven minutes have passed. You are tense. Your heart is thumping past your ribcage, and your lungs are failing to keep up. Your breathing is short and shallow and quick as an escaping prisoner.

Twelve minutes have passed. Everything fades, including you. The only thing you can still clutch are looming thoughts. Your tears are swift and seemingly endless. Your eyes dart to find the hiding monster, nowhere to be seen.

Thirteen minutes have passed. You are faint. You don’t feel real. Your muscles are tense and something deep within your chest is aching. By now, you are cold, so very cold. With each jacket you put on, there are only more chills darting across your skin. You read, somewhere, that sometimes there is heat, but all you know is cold.

Fourteen minutes have passed. Upstairs, you realize your crying is too loud—after all, your family below can’t know. You decide that water might calm the burning in your chest. In the shower, you sit down and let the water batter your skin, let the tears mingle with the falling drops, and let the downpour mask your cracking gasps for air.

Fifteen minutes have passed. Your nails are digging into your palms; you know there will be marks, but the task focuses your

mind. The physical feeling distracts you from the rush of thoughts, as if you’ve been reaching through the fog, and now, your hands found something they can grasp. You feel real. Human. Here. Alive.

Twenty minutes have passed. For a while now, you have been staring straight ahead, urging your heartbeat to slow. Your breathing is staggered yet controlled. You shut your eyes.

*Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. Everything is okay.*

*Everything is okay.* Gradually, you rise. Turn the shower off. Dry your body and face. Your cheeks are no longer red. All that is left are puffy eyes and little curves in the palms of your hands that will fade by sunrise. You are grateful that for you, there is never blood.

The fog has finally cleared. Your body is exhausted but steady. Downstairs, you brew tea like nothing happened. You are thankful—an anxiety attack rarely lasts longer than 20-30 minutes. Once the fight or flight has melted away, you realize how irrational it was. You promise it won’t happen again; although, it inevitably does. It’s not something you can control.

Though the anxiety never truly leaves you, someday, years down the line, you will find the right combination of countering and calming thoughts. Someday, you will find ways to channel the adrenaline. Someday, you will not break like this.

But for now, you rest. You tell yourself everything is okay.

Without the fog, you finally believe it.

*Author’s note: This depiction is not representative of the author’s mental state today.*

Layout by Drew Harper. Illustration by Dalia Emilia.





# Intertwined Journeys

Chloe Hechter

How can writing be used to build community? The Narratio Fellowship provides an answer. This annual intensive storytelling and leadership program provides resettled refugee youth with the tools and resources to share their narratives and creative works on the world stage. Students work with a cohort to write their stories and form long-lasting bonds in the process.

Brice Nordquist, associate professor and Dean's Professor of Community Engagement and co-creator and co-director of the fellowship program, has been working at the North Side Learning Center (NSLC) since moving to Syracuse almost seven years ago. He has helped to develop curriculum and programming that includes running arts-based classes and workshops with different collaborators. The Narratio Fellowship program emerged out of a collaboration that SU writing professor Eileen Schell put into motion when she invited Iraqi-American author and poet Ahmed M. Badr, to campus for events in support of the department's creative nonfiction reading series.

Badr led a storytelling workshop at the NSLC and soon after, Nordquist and Badr began building the Narratio Fellowship program.

Intertwined Journeys, the theme for the program's inaugural cohort, is a collaboration between the Narratio Fellowship and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Ancient Near East Department. The project features poetry performances by resettled refugee youth and a series of local and national photography and writing exhibits. The project is designed to showcase the stories around intertwined journeys of objects, people, and cultures from their homelands to reimagined futures. Participants have found the experience extremely rewarding, seeing it as an opportunity to cultivate a stronger sense of self and community.

The two poems featured on the following pages were written by SU students Nidaa Aljabbarin and Ibraheem Abdi, who presented their work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Aljabbarin's poem "The Day I Left," written shortly after her grandfather passed away, is a representation of the day she

and her family left Jordan to be resettled in the United States. She remembers her grandfather saying that they would come back to Syria or Jordan to visit, but she knew that they wouldn't after he died. Her poem was inspired by "Vessel" (3rd century B.C–1st century A.D.), a bronze cast believed to be from Iran. It reminded Nidaa of all of the objects that her family packed away and how the key to the house—the item that held all of them together—was lost.

Ibraheem's object was "Arrowhead" (ca. early 1st millennium B.C.), a class of weapons excavated in northwestern Iran and Transcaucasia. His poem by the same name tells a story of prevailing through hardships and standing tall despite challenging circumstances.

The poems featured here and others appear in Ahmed M. Badr's *While the Earth Sleeps We Travel*: [www.earthsleepswetravel.com](http://www.earthsleepswetravel.com).

To learn more about the Narratio Fellowship: <https://narratio.org/fellowship>.

To learn more about the North Side Learning Center (NSLC): <https://northsidelearning.org>.

Layout by Chloe Hechter. Photographs by Edward Grattan.



## The Day I Left

Nidaa Aljabbarin

*Yā beet jede, tha'a al maftah, wa bouabak tebki ala elrah*

Oh grandfather, our house key is lost, and the doors cry for those who left.

I wake up, and my eyes immediately forget the taste of a good sleep.

I look around wondering what there is left to see.

I see my grandfather, the vessel, and the house key.

I look at the vessel, not understanding what I see. I see my grandfather's eyes as he prepares to face his fears. Fears that we're all leaving, like drops of tears.

I walk out of the house not knowing why I must leave. Everyone holds my hands, giving me something I need. Then my grandfather asks me, "Where is the house key?"

I don't know, *jede*.

Will we be back to use this key again?

Will the doors be there to greet us?

I set foot in the street, knowing what my body needs.

My thoughts fight among themselves, bleeding into tears.

I don't recognize the look in my grandfather's eyes

He looks as if he is about to face his worst fear.

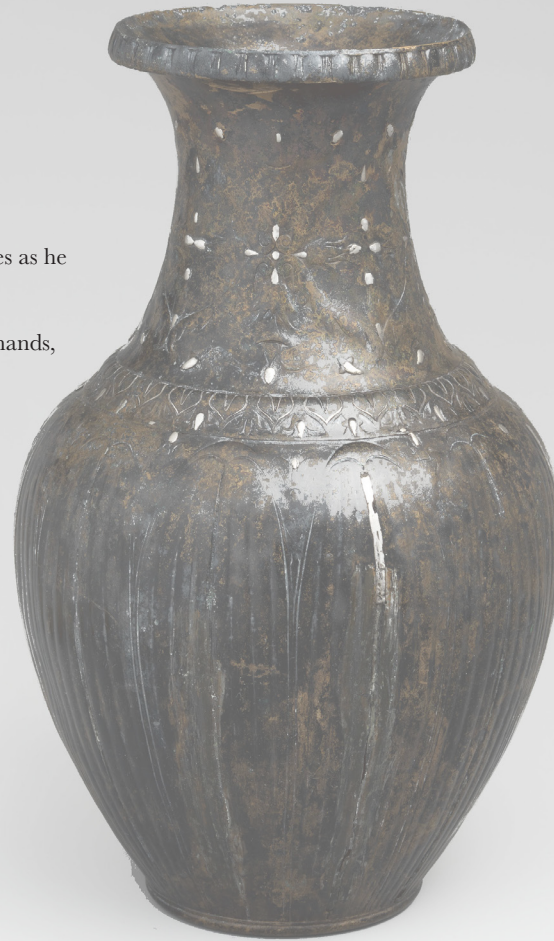
The fear turns into a teardrop.

He takes his glasses off, but the tear is stubborn

It refuses to leave his face.

*Yā beet jede, tha'a al maftah, wa bouabak tebki ala elrah*

Oh grandfather, our house key is lost, and the doors cry for those who left.



Nidaa Aljabbarin was born and raised in Syria. She lived there until she was thirteen when she fled to Jordan during the war. After three years in Jordan, she and her family (with eight siblings) came to the U.S. in late 2016. She received her high school diploma from a public high school in Syracuse and after graduating, completed a specialty degree in math and science at Onondaga Community College. She then transferred to SU, where she is currently a junior pursuing her B.A. in biology on a premed track.

I had the pleasure of meeting with Nidaa to discuss writing and how her time at the NSLC helped shape her identity. She explained, "Writing with the Narratio Fellows, it basically helped me share my thoughts, what I've gone through. Not only to my friends, but to the world." That sense of outreach is important to Nidaa, who was able to connect to a broader audience. "It's telling your story," she explained, "in a different, creative, and better way."

We discussed the importance of finding a sense of community and camaraderie with those who understand you and your history. She explained, "When we started, we didn't know a lot, but as time went on, we got so close that we almost memorized each other's poetry." Before her performance, she said, "Having eye contact with them—the group—made me more comfortable because they were the people who know."

To learn more about "Vessel," visit [www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/325841](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/325841).



## Arrowhead Ibraheem Abdi

Someone shouts: War has come! War has come!

Young boys are running,  
mothers are crying,  
sisters are hiding.

Protecting and being protected,  
unclear which is which.

Fathers are on the front lines.

War has come! War has come!

*If you encounter the enemy, do not run away and show them your back.*

Horse galloping, shields clanking, swords clashing, *slash slash slash*.

Someone lost a father,  
someone lost a brother,  
someone lost a son.

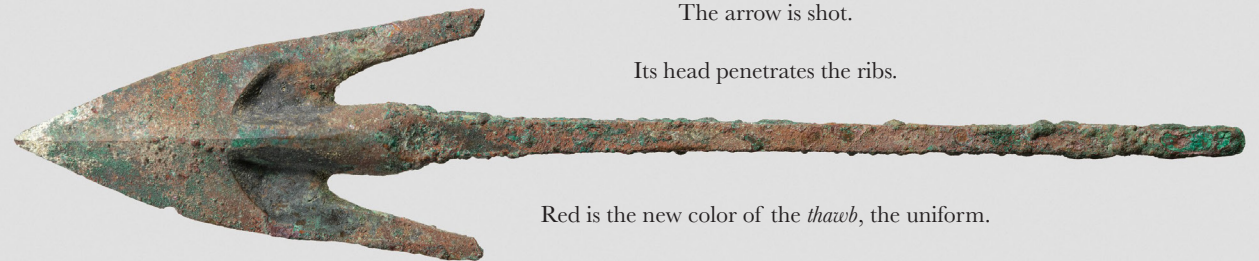
The arrow is shot.

Its head penetrates the ribs.

Red is the new color of the *thawb*, the uniform.

I lost my father,  
they lost a brother,  
Grandma lost her son.

*Stand my sons, stand tall—arrows cannot penetrate the will.*



Ibraheem Abdi is a junior at Syracuse University, studying to become a social worker. He is a former Kenyan refugee who fled from war with his family. After settling in Kakuma for ten months, Ibraheem and his family were given the opportunity to come to America. Syracuse has become a second home. He has found a sense of belonging through service with Interfaith Works and the Islamic Society of Central New York. He wants to dedicate his life to social work as a way of giving back to the community.

His poem “Arrowhead” tells a story of remaining strong and resilient when hardship strikes. He sees himself as “a man on a journey to give back to the community that has raised him and taught him what he knows today.”

The Arrowhead, pictured right, is from Gallery 404 of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is a cast bronze arrowhead with a triangular head, raised midrib, and shaft that is typically square or rectangular.

To learn more, visit [www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327443](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327443).

# NO CANCER

Christian Abdo

**H**e didn't cry because his lymph nodes were swollen and painful. He didn't cry when he learned it was because he had cancer. But he cried when he learned he'd lose his hair.

My stomach rumbled after a long day at the beach. I was staying with my aunt, uncle, and cousins at the Jersey Shore. We spent hours every day in the ocean, getting tossed around by the waves, eating just a few sandy potato chips, and maybe a juice box during the day. I was too shy, or lazy, to speak up about my hunger. Every wave pushed me closer to dinner, but everyone still needed to wash off the greasy mix of salt water, sunscreen, and sand before we left. Our cramped motel room only had one bathroom. I waited two hours to shower in cold water. Ritz-Carlton. I just wanted to go to

dinner as soon as possible. Someone asked, "Where's Andy?" I knew right where my cousin was: standing in front of the mirror, like always, styling his hair. He wasn't going out on a date or trying to get girls' numbers, but he always needed perfect hair. He was always fixing his hair, adding gel, and combing. I'll give it to him; his hair did look good.

• • •

I wasn't the only one who got hangry after a long day at the beach. One time, I was sitting on the sofa, shoulder to shoulder with my cousins, and tension was brewing. Andy and I were fourteen years old. Puberty was underway. His sister made a comment about these weird bumps that were developing in his breast area. A fight broke out in motel room 308. She never made a comment about the bumps again, but that lone

comment was one more than Andy's doctor ever made.

Two years later, the bumps had moved to his armpit and neck. I asked what they were, but he said his doctor had told him that they were nothing. I couldn't help but wonder why there would be random bumps. Random? The body doesn't do random. Why would it? My body didn't do that. *Cancer* crossed my mind. I didn't want to say anything. A teenage boy doesn't just throw something so heavy out there. *Cancer* was and is always *italicized* in my head. I was just paranoid. It's nothing, they'd say.

• • •

Years went by of Andy and I playing sports together, watching games, and just hanging out. He practically lived at my house. At age eighteen, I started to see him

less because his doctor's appointments had started to multiply. Tests left and right, and not because it was midterm week at school. The suspense wasn't even that suspenseful; I knew something bad was coming.

My phone buzzed while I was sitting in the cafeteria. I went to the bathroom and sat on the toilet, speechless. Kids were blowing clouds of Juul vapor and making plans for the weekend. Girls in the cafeteria were gossiping about homecoming. I had more on my mind that day. What was going to happen? How was Andy? My best friend. Cancer. Something you hear so much about, but still feels like it will never affect you.

I had to do everything I could to help Andy.

• • •

My lawn was the stadium for weekly Sunday Football. Sunday Football featured a

Layout by Lydia Engel.

Photograph by American Tobacco Campus. CC BY-NC 2.0, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/96326056@N06/8812631592>.



game of two-hand touch football, and a ton of junk food while we watched NFL games. Lots of people from my school would come to play. A core group was always there: my closest friends and Andy, despite him going to a different school. We called ourselves the “Sunday Football Guys.”

The games went on, even though Andy had cancer. His mobility slowly decreased, but he still looked like the rest of us out there. One thing stood out: his winter hat. A winter hat was glued to his head, although winter was still a few months away. Andy would be overheating, but he still wouldn’t take the hat

one length of haircut—bald. Bald or bust. A few months into Andy’s treatment, his hair was patchy. Gregory was going to open on a Sunday to shave all our heads, “all” as of then, being me and Andy. I needed to rally the Sunday Football Guys to support Andy by shaving their heads. The reasoning was simple: The more bald guys around, the less noticeable it’d make Andy. He wouldn’t stick out like a sore thumb. For the time being, bald would become normal. I texted the guys about the plan. No one responded. If I texted them, “Come over, the Jets are playing Cleveland,” they’d be there in fifteen



Andy and the “Sunday Football Guys” after their haircuts.

Standing (from left to right): Hugh, Andy, Christian, Jack, PJ, Ben, Luke, Mikey, Shane.

Kneeling (from left to right): Kane, Josh, Dan, Eddie

off. Beneath it, his hair was migrating south for the winter. His pride was heading south, too, down to the beach where he always made sure he had perfect hair. A Sunday Football teammate was in trouble.

• • •

Haircuts at Gregory’s Barbershop cost \$22, but for us, they’d be free. There was one catch: Gregory was only going to give us

minutes. Where were they now?

As if they were five-star football players in high school and not just kids in my yard, I began recruiting my friends, one by one, to shave their heads. Like any type of peer pressure, some gave in more easily. Mikey shaves his head as his normal haircut, so obviously, he was in. It was essentially just a free haircut for him. PJ shaved his head for a rap album

once, and it looked surprisingly good, so he was in. Jack, who was still working on his first kiss, said he had nothing to lose. The others were going to be harder to convince. It didn’t help that it was our last year in high school. It was time for that final push to lose your virginity or get some sexual experience before college.

Using what I’d learned in my microeconomics class, I put on my salesman shoes and started to persuade my friend Ben. Ben is big into fashion and his aesthetic. Unlike most teenage boys, he doesn’t just throw on whatever clothes are at the top of his dresser. Parting ways with his middle part was going to be a blow to his style, but he said he’d do it. Last to be convinced, was my friend Luke, who was suddenly having success with girls. People said he had had a “glow up,” meaning that puberty turned him from an awkward looking kid to a pretty handsome guy. Based on numerous compliments, his luscious dark hair was a key factor in his glow up. Luke reluctantly said he would shave his head, despite slowly becoming a long-haired legend with the ladies. The guys all said yes, but I didn’t know if any of them would actually come.

Gregory’s Barbershop was empty when I walked in. Gregory wasn’t even there while I was setting up tables of food for all the subs going to waste. Why was I worried about the stupid subs? I guess that would’ve meant no one showed up for Andy. I nervously fired off a few texts to the Sunday Football Guys. Where the heck were they? It was still early, but where the heck were they? Jack lifted a weight off my shoulders when he was the first to stroll in. Luke was next, which

was big, because he had a lot of hair on the line. He was tapping his foot and sweating as he waited. Ben arrived next, saying he would’ve been there sooner if he didn’t drive around the neighborhood a couple of times contemplating. One by one, the Sunday Football Guys arrived.

The crowd erupted when Andy walked in. “Surprise!” He sat down in front of the barber and took his hat off right away. This was the first time anyone, including his parents, had had a good look at his hair since it started to fall out. Well, there wasn’t much to see.

We rooted on Andy for a while, but soon it was time. I was wrapped in an apron, placed in a chair next to Andy, and one of Gregory’s apprentices started buzzing away at my head. The Sunday Football Guys filled the chairs in the barbershop today, not positions on the field. The fictional football teams in my yard every week were just part of the bigger team we really were. We were the Sunday Football Guys. Shortly, everyone’s hair was gone. Even my dad participated—this guy had to go to work tomorrow! The Sunday Football Guys got everyone involved. We ate all the subs, too.

• • •

When someone has cancer, cells divide uncontrollably. When faced with the sacrifice of getting rid of our hair, there was a chance my friend group would become divided. Would I look at my friends the same if they said no? Would asking them to shave their heads be cancerous to our friendship? Thankfully, this wasn’t a story of division. This was a story of unity. Cell fusion is when individual cells combine to form a single cell called a syncytium. There was no cancer here.

Photograph courtesy of author.



# recognition

Layout by Ashley Clemens. Art by Julianna Markus.

**W**ho are the people who have shaped the person you are today? As much as 2020 and 2021 have been about grappling with resistance and resilience, these past two years have also given us the opportunity to reckon with our past, to reflect upon, remember, and give recognition to the people we have known, the philosophies and quirks that they have shared with us, and the stories they have left behind.

Recognition begins with perception, the ability to look outside oneself and notice something: something that doesn't quite fit with your worldview, something that may make you uncomfortable. Recognition can evoke complicated feelings: gratitude, regret, anxiety, or a stubborn motley of all these emotions. Each of the stories in this section deal in some capacity with the act of recognizing, and the unusual emotions entangled with it. What comes next is the internalization of what you perceive, a uniquely difficult step, whether it be processing grief at the loss of a loved one, really listening to a peer when they speak to you, or recognizing your own biases.

In "Mou Léipeis," Shelby Rodger tells a coming of age story in that centered on her relationship with her Greek grandmother—her yiayia, whose death and memory have caused a rupture to her worldview. Through moments of grief and fragments of faulty memories, Rodger remembers her yiayia, and also remembers herself growing up through the eyes of her grandma.

In "The Pulchritudinous Cardinal," Alison Pelkonen struggles with a lack of recognition of the severity of COVID-19 and the

devastating impact it has wreaked in her family. By illustrating the character of her grandfather, Pelkonen shows readers a glimpse of what has been lost during the pandemic and the dire consequences of non-compliance with COVID-19 protocols. The sense of grief within this piece is profound, but we can also find a sense of self-recognition and peace as the author learns to accept the pain they have had to endure. "Pulchritudinous" means beautiful, after all.

In "The Best Player in Town," Collin Helwig reflects upon a childhood friendship that innocently navigates the tension caused by rash judgement from others and the preconceived notions that we attach to strangers. Recounting a chilly night of pickup basketball, Helwig gives recognition to a friend from a very different familial background and pays tribute to the bond that they shared.

In "Zen," Alexandra Manzano writes in jest about her father, a middle-aged man whose mid-life crisis comes as a sudden calling to Zen Buddhism. Manzano describes the different traditions of this particular incarnation of Zen consisting of hot yoga, yard décor, and floating on his pillow.

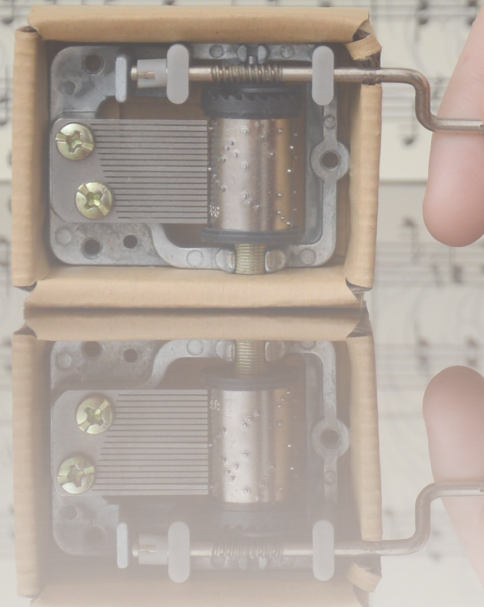
All of these contributions highlight personal recognitions, big and small. They show us stories of personal evolution and just how much you can accomplish when left to your own devices. They also show us how the act of writing these stories can in and of themselves be a powerful act of recognition. Writing can be a way to process and understand, or at least try to understand, this crazy world around us.

—Bonnie Yu and Drew Harper



# Μου λείπεις (Mou Leipeis)

Shelby Rodger



Layout by Aminata Ceesay. Photograph by Annatsach, CC BY-SA 4.0: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Small\\_music\\_box.jpg?uselang=en](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Small_music_box.jpg?uselang=en).

My life starts in 1999 in a small single-story home in the San Fernando Valley just north of Los Angeles. My grandmother—who my mom tells me to call my yiayia because we’re Greek—lives just a few blocks away. Like every typical Southern California house, the floors in every room are made of tile. Sometimes I like to lay down face first and feel how cool they are.

Next to my bed is a ceramic music box with the moon and stars painted on it—I don’t remember who gave it to me. I always

ask my mom to twist the bottom of it for me since my hands aren’t strong enough yet. The song it plays makes me imagine living in another world—as far away from Earth as possible.

Our front yard is picturesque with bright green grass, tulips, and little curved bricks surrounding the walkway. Our backyard is the exact opposite: dirt mounds on one side and cement on the other. One day I come home from the grocery store with my mom excited about the cookies she bought me. I run a bit too fast and end up tripping and



scraping my knee. Tears stream down my face, and I notice how the blood mixes with the dirt and becomes a dark maroon color.

Early in the morning as a toddler, my mom wakes me up and starts getting ready for work. My eyelids always feel so heavy, but somehow I find the strength to walk across the hall to her room. I cuddle up with my feet in the blanket and watch PBS until it's time to leave for daycare.

I am four years old. My yiayia now lives with my mom and me in a new and much bigger house. Somehow there's a lemon tree in our almost entirely cement backyard. Whenever my yiayia showers, I like to sit outside the door and listen to the water falling. It relaxes me. She keeps a jar of pistachios in her room next to her bed, and sometimes when she's not looking I'll run over and sneak a couple into my hand, although I don't yet know how to take the shells off. For some reason I feel too scared to ask for some.

My tiny room is always too messy. The walls are sponge-painted purple and yellow, and my bed frame has cutouts of moons and stars. Tiny windows look out to the cement driveway of our neighbors' house.

One day I forget to put away my toys and my clothes. My yiayia walks in to find socks, shoes, and stuffed animals sprawled across the floor from my bed to my dresser. She is disappointed and tells me, "If you don't clean your room, spiders will show up in your bathtub." Terrified, I clean my room faster and faster every day that passes.

My mom still works, so my yiayia is the one who gets me ready for preschool. The public schools in Granada Hills are not that great. My yiayia tells me I'm going to a private school for Greek Orthodox children. She normally helps me pick out my uniform. "Shorts or skirt?" is the question she asks me every morning. I usually pick the skirt. After I wash my face, she always reminds me to clean my ears: "Remember what your doctor said. If you don't clean your ears, cauliflower will grow inside them." As she drives me to school, she makes me memorize every cross street we pass. It's a lot of information. I wish I still remembered. Once or twice a week, she takes me to a bakery in Chatsworth where I usually eat a chocolate donut for breakfast.

My school is small, but to me, it feels huge. Every Friday afternoon we sit in church. I don't remember any of the words spoken during the service, but I do remember the pizza they give us for lunch. I have a few friends, yet I still feel lonely. One friend tells me that I can't play in the tiny plastic house with her and her friends. I don't know how to defend myself. I really want to play with them. I know my teacher doesn't care. I walk away and sulk by myself. There's one girl a year older than me who always waves from outside whenever she walks by the door. I wave back. Her smile is so bright and perfect. I've never known her name, but I wish I could be her. When I get home from school, I'm always thankful for my mom and my yiayia. They are my only real friends.

The next year, my mom gets laid off. I don't know what this means. She tells me that we are moving to New Hampshire where gas is cheaper and the public schools are better. I still don't know what this means, but I do know I need new friends. Maybe a move wouldn't be the worst thing. "You'll have some family there, at least," is what my mom says to me.

I'm excited until I realize my yiayia isn't coming with us. I guess she does have her entire life here in California. I've also overheard from my family members that her health is starting to decline. Once again, I am confused. I imagine a cartoon body with the health meter next to it all the way down. Is that what happens to people in real life? The day we move, I cry a little. I'm not excited to lose a best friend. Why can't she just come with us?

Once I'm in New Hampshire, my curiosity grows even more. I quickly start to orient myself to my new surroundings. At only six years old, I am a resilient child. I see my cousins who live down the street every week. My yard has more trees than I've ever seen in my life. Other kids on my street play in my neighbor's yard because they have a pond. Sometimes I'm invited.

Other times I am not, so instead I sit in my driveway and watch them. I hear them laugh. Their screams are loud. I want to join them, but I don't know how.

In second grade, I decide to take a dance class once a week. Our recital at the end

of the year is *The Wizard of Oz*, and I am a munchkin. My yiayia comes all the way from California to see it, along with my older cousin Maria. I can't stop fidgeting and clicking my legs together during the hour-long car ride to the airport. I'm excited to finally hug my yiayia again.

On the day of the show, Maria curls my hair for me and teaches me how to count to ten in French. "Repeat after me. Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix." After many attempts, I am finally able to pronounce all of them. I imagine the two of us going to Paris one day and sprinting underneath the Eiffel Tower.

Once I'm in my costume, Maria fixes up my minimalistic makeup and we all take pictures in my driveway. My mom takes out a camera, and I refuse to stand next to anyone other than my yiayia. I try as hard as I can not to sneeze from all the hairspray. After the show, we all go to dinner and my yiayia tells me how great of a dancer I am. My mom tells me my class had one of the most synchronized dances in the entire show. I feel like a celebrity.

The car ride back to the airport a week later is much more somber. My legs and feet are still fidgeting, but this time it's from the overwhelming anxiety. I don't want to say goodbye to my family. Especially not my yiayia. I'm dreading the moment. Walking through the door of my house with my mom after dropping them off feels so quiet and a little bit lonely. I miss the energy. I am deaf-



ened by the silence for a couple of moments.

The pain quickly dissipates and a few years pass. I am ten years old. A couple of my friends have pools in their yards. If I'm lucky, I'm invited over. My friend Amanda starts inviting me over a lot. Sometimes, we'll hop out of the pool and run over to the giant swing set in front of the woods. Dirt, pebbles, and tiny blades of grass stick together and turn into mud on the bottoms of my wet bare feet. For some reason, it never bothers me. Laughing and screaming, it's days like these that finally make up for all those times I was too afraid to run over to my neighbor's house.

I am eleven years old. I have just found out that my yiayia has died from 3,000 miles away. It's early in the morning right before a completely regular day of school. My mom calls me into her bedroom. She isn't crying, but she still speaks to me. "So, I have some news and you don't have to go to school today if you don't want to. But yiayia died early this morning."

She had Alzheimer's disease and dementia. I don't know what this means. The only thing my mom and the rest of my family keep telling me is that she lost her memory. I don't understand how someone could die simply from losing their memory, but I accept it as the truth. I stand in the doorway staring at my mom for several minutes, each of which feels like hours. I nod my head.

Somehow, I still go to school.

I know that I'm sad, but I don't cry. Death feels like the ultimate mystery to me. A few

weeks later, I find an old photograph from underneath my mom's bed, and I am reminded of her again. It's from when I was just a baby in California. I have no memory of it, but seeing her face again finally makes me cry a little, partly because she's gone, but mainly because I lost so much time with her. It's been six years since I went from seeing her every day to seeing her once a year—if I'm lucky. A part of me wants to follow her to wherever she is.

My emotions are too heavy for me to carry. My brain doesn't understand yet, so all the pain goes straight to my chest. I keep repeating to myself the same question I asked six years ago: Why couldn't she come with us?

Many more years pass. I have moved on from her death faster than I should have. Maybe it's because my family was expecting it to happen, and as a result I was prepared for it. Or it's possible that I was simply too young. I didn't understand the permanence of death. Exhausted and overwhelmed, my subconscious self might have just kept pushing it down until it no longer hurt. I rarely remember crying—only once or twice a year at most.

There's one night in particular when I feel closer to my yiayia than I ever felt when she was still alive. I am a senior in high school, only a few days before my eighteenth birthday. I've just been accepted to Syracuse, after getting rejected from every other film school I applied to. I suppose that's where I'm going. I wish I could tell my yiayia the news.

The night is just like any one of the hundreds of other school nights I've had before. Once my calculus homework is at least half finished, I give up and let myself go to bed. My room is completely black except for the faint blue glow of the alarm clock on my nightstand.

If it were summertime, I'd be able to hear the frogs croaking in my neighbor's pond, but unfortunately my March birthday always falls just before it actually turns into Spring. I'm somewhere in between a state of consciousness and dreaming when suddenly that small ceramic music box—still on top of my dresser—starts playing all on its own.

It's not the same song it used to play when I was a kid. Instead, it just sounds like a bunch of arbitrary notes here and there and then finally all the notes play at once, as if someone took a knife and slashed through the tiny strings inside of it.

The noise scares me. I immediately sit up and turn my lamp back on. A few moments of complete silence pass before I carefully put my feet on the floor and walk over to it. I pick it up and examine the bottom. Noth-

ing seems to be broken. I twist the knob as far as it'll go, and it starts playing the same old song it always plays. The next day, I tell my mom about it, fully expecting her to joke around with me. "There is a cemetery up the hill from our house," I imagine her saying, "Maybe it was a ghost." What she says

instead completely surprises me.

"It was probably just yiayia wishing you a happy birthday." My eyes widen and I don't really know what I should say. My mom seems so wistfully sad about it.

"Really? You think that's what it was?" "Probably. I wouldn't worry too much about it."

I've never believed in ghosts before, and even now I still find it hard to believe. The thought of my yiayia doesn't make me cry this time. Once

I'm back in my room, I hold the little music box in my hand and a laugh escapes from me. Haunting me right before my birthday is definitely something she would do. The idea amuses me. As much as I wish more than anything for her to be alive, I find comfort in even the smallest possibility that my time with her isn't over yet.

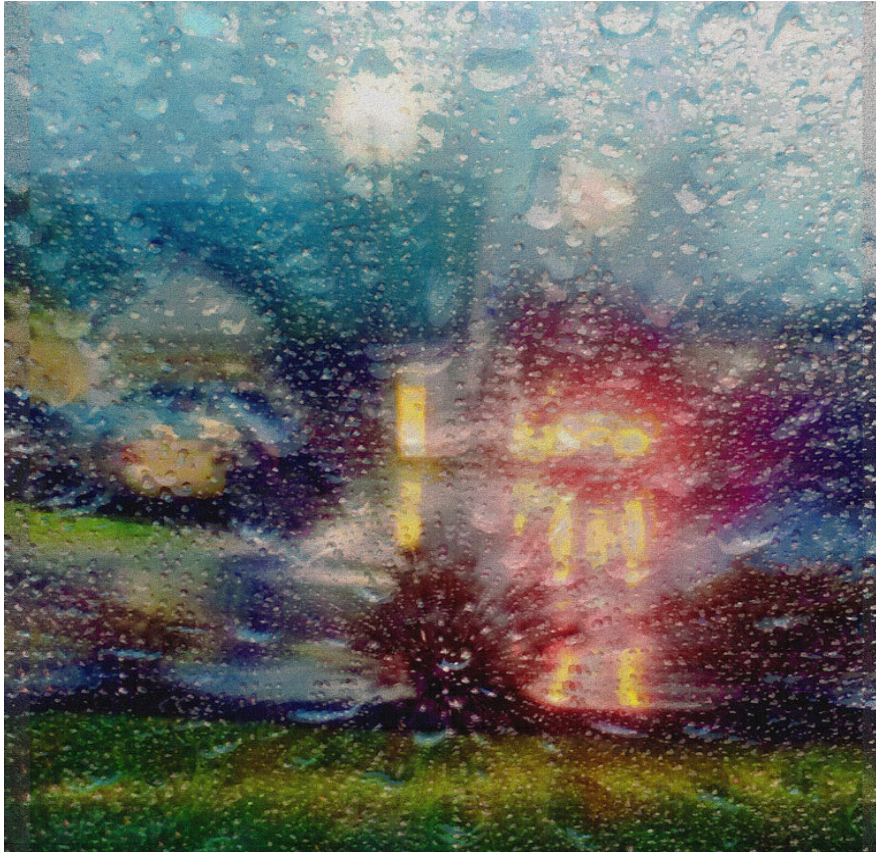


Grandpa and Yiayia, circa 1960

Photography courtesy of author.

# The Pulchritudinous Cardinal

Alison Pelkonen



I never read the newspaper. March was a different time for the United States, a time of hope and ignorance. Everyone hated our economics class. My snooze-worthy teacher made us read the newspaper every day. Kids colored in the words “COVID-19,” while others admired the beautiful architecture of the moldy ceiling. I decided to listen to the

man standing at the front of the tiny well-lit classroom. China and Italy were experiencing death after death. Just some numbers in the newspaper, increasing exponentially day after day. My mind wandered. This one thought has been replaying on a loop since April. Those numbers are people, siblings, parents, sons, and daughters. The thought crept in:

“That would never happen to me.” No way could the United States come under attack to that degree. It’s ridiculous to even let my mind wander to that place. Nothing that bad could ever happen to me.

My nanny and papa were married when they were teenagers. My nanny was only nineteen when she first became pregnant. I always felt the love they had for each other. Strolling into the same room, their unconditional love made you feel safe. Papa’s constant demand to see wrinkles forming in the sides of anyone’s mouth as they try to control their laughter. Nanny, shouting his name from across the room, “BABE!” It was a special type of love. Even in his old age, he would do anything for her. He was trying to grasp her medicine, standing on a rusty chair that could have been from the 1950s, when the unforgivable chair wobbled and knocked him off. My papa, the strongest, brightest soul broke his hip while the pandemic was at its worst.

Numbers in the newspaper climbed, faster than anyone anticipated. My papa, a healthy man, was caught in the hospital at the wrong time. “He died,” my mom announced with a stone-cold look. Emotionless. I could tell she was broken, in shock because this wasn’t supposed to happen. Not to us. My stomach dropped to my feet. My mind and my heart began to race, seeing which one could comprehend the two words that had just floated above my head. Spinning with confusion, I closed my door, slowly. My bright green room didn’t look as vibrant as it just had. I heard my nanny downstairs. With the dementia kicking in, she was more disoriented than my mother and me.

I chose to run. If I drive fast enough,

the problems I left at home won’t be able to catch up with me. My normal emotionless state began to intensify until it broke me. *Does my sister know? Why did I just leave? Should I have stayed and comforted my mom who just lost her dad?* Selfishness overflowed my eyes. I needed to leave. I needed to understand how someone I knew, someone I loved, contracted a virus that I never thought could affect me. This wasn’t supposed to be real life; those were just numbers. My naive mind couldn’t understand the heartbreak that was going to occur within the next five minutes. The world spun around me while I had experienced what all those other people did before me, what my class was too ignorant to read about. My steering wheel was now soaking wet with regret—regret for the way I thought two months ago. The fog forming on the glass of my car felt like the truth setting in. There was no escape. Rapidly realizations of the minutes prior entered my dingy Subaru, Stanley.

Collapsed within my once carefree high school parking lot, a place uninhabited since March, I allowed myself to implode. I felt every emotion: anger, disgust, regret, sorrow, hopelessness, and pain. I have never cried with so much suffering before. I began to abuse Stanley, bashing in his steering wheel. I screamed bloody murder, over and over and over until I ran out of breath, and all you could see was pure pain on my ghostly muted face with inflamed bloodshot eyes.

Matt is my closest friend and has been since I was eleven. He was the only one who knew he was in the hospital. All I could think to do was pick up the blurry phone and click his name. I repeated the same words my mother said to me minutes ago, “He died.”

Layout by Benjamin Goldsmith. Photograph by Bill Smith, CC BY 2.0. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/10688882@N00/37650347482>.



Matt could hear the heartbreak in my voice, cracking while trying to catch my breath. The only person who could make me happy during any situation knew it was impossible to take away my pain.

Selfishly, I interrogated him. “Do I tell my friends? I didn’t even tell them he had it. What do I say? Please, help me. I don’t know what to do. I can’t go home. I can’t go home. Please, help me!” I barely let him get a word in.

After sitting in my lifeless high school parking lot for over an hour, Stanley and I returned home. The front door that once brought me warmth opened while I carefully stepped past the mat, taking in my last breath of solitude before being swallowed by the woeful cloud forming in my kitchen. My nanny was in shambles. The wooden stairs creaked as my feet quickly rushed up them before anyone could see my bloodshot eyes and swollen soaked face. It’s mentally draining for someone who rarely knows what year it is to comprehend COVID-19. I crumpled onto my scratched up floor with my ear to the door, listening to my nanny scream. The agony in her voice made me sick.

“How did your father get sick? Since I’ve known him, he has never even gotten the flu. He’s strong. How did he get sick in the hospital? The hospital killed him. They killed him. The hospital killed him. I’m going to sue them. They killed him!” She might have been confused, but she wasn’t wrong. They killed him. They killed my papa, and there was nothing that we could do about it.

My mother and I are replicas of each other. We don’t allow others to see us in pain. It was an unspoken rule. Now more than ever, we had to uphold. We did it for Nanny.

Around her, there was no reason to bring up the fact that he was dead. It was over. He wasn’t coming home. So we didn’t bring it up. I took everything I was feeling and forced it down my throat until I felt nothing. I went numb.

“We are going to be late, Alison. Hurry up!” For the past two never-ending weeks, my mom was on edge. My nanny threw on her black coat. “Don’t forget the black masks,” she called. It was awkward. The tragic mask served as a constant reminder of just how my papa died. The neighbors watched the humble procession slowly make its way out. We admired the hearse as it pulled away from the house. I recorded the whole thing: my papa passing his childhood home and then his home away from home, and his work, North Shore Collision Corporation, for the last time.

We pulled into Saint Mary’s, and all I could think about was the horror that those families were about to go through. It still disgusts me. Only a small amount of family was allowed to watch my papa get put in the ground. I hadn’t hugged anyone for over a month. Locking eyes with my cousins, the rules of social distancing vanished. I ran over and wrapped my arms so tightly around them, they had to pry me off. This wasn’t the family reunion I had hoped for, but it was the closest thing to it. Nestled in the arms of loved ones, my scrunched mask caught my tears. The least agonizing part of burying my papa was when we threw in the roses. Amidst the clouds, a ray of sun beamed down into his coffin. I’m not sure anyone else noticed, but as the flowers fell to him, I knew he was warm. Some flowers missed the coffin and rested on the grass beside, but

I threw mine with perfect aim, a perfect arc. I’ve played basketball since I was ten. Every time I saw my papa, he would ask me, “How many baskets have you made?” and “When’s your next game?” He loved talking to me about it. We used to practice shooting in the family room together with invisible balls, invisible nets, and laughter.

One of the last times I saw my papa was at my basketball game. He watched me play intently. I played well that game and I could tell he was proud. He told my mom that he wanted to see me play again. So with perfection, I lobbed my rose in his grave. I knew he was watching.

None of us had closure. COVID-19 changed every aspect of my life, both good and bad. My mother and I never fully got over his death. Instead of accepting that this was our life, we chose to talk to a medium. I don’t necessarily believe in mediums, but when you’re desperate for answers you’ll believe anything that bears hope.

Sitting in my freshly saged room, I reluctantly hopped on Zoom with a long-nailed lady wearing a colorful, beaded necklace who was supposed to tell me everything I needed to hear. Through her, my papa told me things that made me feel safe again. Things that made me laugh again. She said he will always be with me. She said a pulchritudinous, bright red cardinal would come

singing to get our attention. She said it would be him sending the bird to help us heal. Each day, I saw the cardinal. My papa made me fall in love with cardinals.

It’s not possible for anyone to understand how much pain someone who lost a loved one to COVID-19 carries every day. I went through each day suffering in silence, constantly alone with only my thoughts. I never told anyone that I lost someone to COVID. They’d only pity me. “I’m so sorry for your loss.” I’ve heard it enough.

In the months following his death, I crawled back into a shell. I just wanted to be alone. The only place I’d put my pain was in a tan journal, decorated with stars. It was always there for me as I sobbed into the pages, documenting my days. It became like a friend. A best friend. Though as time went on, I slowly pushed it away. My journal had been there for me, but I had grown stronger. I was evolving into someone I always wanted to be, someone who stopped judging those around them for the way they acted. My ignorance grew into the accepting body of a beautiful cardinal. I was full of knowledge, empathy, hope, and love. I can honestly say I’ve never been more grateful for the pain I had to endure. Now I can fly free, knowing the days are only getting brighter. Even when you’re in pain, life doesn’t stop.



Photograph by woodleywonderworks, CC BY 2.0, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/73645804@N00/16338562909>.

# The Best

# Player in Town

Collin Helwig

**A**t this rate, the Nike Elite 2006 logo should scratch off my new basketball just as quickly as your dad's hand stamps from the bar around the block, likely to warrant the same head shakes and eye rolls from my parents. Our road's unforgiving cracks combined with the misty rain pouring across it weather the ball without patience or mercy. But as eight-year old kids, we instead worry about our spelling tests next week, those jerky older kids on the bus, and how much longer until the already setting sun bids us farewell. The ball whips through the net and falls straight into a puddle, causing some ice-cold water to splash up into my face.

"Fuuuuck!" I immediately shout before stretching out my sleeves to dry my face. It feels good to throw around the F-word freely without any parents or teachers around to scold us. Still immersed, the ball soaks more water into its artificial leather, and it bounces with a heavy thud after I pick it up and begin dribbling it back out from under the rim. It feels like a distorted bowling ball that might sink if it were to bounce past us into the nearby creek. The ball's surface feels terribly frigid, and I even consider wrapping up my hands with my batting gloves.

"You remember when Kobe wore that Adidas glove during his second season with the Lakers?" I ask. Snapping my wrists, I throw a chest pass right to your hands.

"Yeah, I think there's a reason he only wore it for one game, though," you reply after catching it.

"Maybe then I'll be the one to bring it back into style," I joke back while watching you cross the ball over between your legs.

We both loved Kobe Bryant, though over 2,000 miles stood between us and the Staples Center. That "Mamba Mentality," focused on winning and nothing else, etched itself into our brains with ease. The ball bounces off my foot, but I chase it down before it begins rolling down the hill.

Toward our road's darker end, your house sits quietly, with your dad's car once again absent from the driveway even with nightfall soon approaching. With you and I as the only exceptions, our street looks deserted, lifeless even. Although we see lights from within every other house glowing with warmth, likely with Mr. McGee inside reading his *Golfer's Digest* magazines and Mrs. Clarke with her fifty-some cats, we feel well removed from civilization. It certainly differs from the professional environment typically present at Kobe's past games. The bouncing ball's sound echoes, seeming almost like a siren at a nuke town.

This time your shot misses, and I collect the rebound. I soon realize how ridiculous I might look wearing my gloves, even without an actual audience to witness it, so I drop the idea. Instead, I turn and toss up a shot

Layout by Kyle McDonald. Photograph by Dapo Abideen.



from behind our road's farthest crack, the one we all accept as a three-point line despite never having actually measured it out. "Cash money!" I shout while mimicking Carmelo Anthony's "three point to the dome" celebration. Few things sound better than a ball unapologetically whipping through a net, giving birth to the insuppressible self-confidence we both chase every time we pick up a ball. My satisfaction doubles, though, when I watch your shot clank off the rim's back side after beautifully arcing through the air. But after flying beyond my reach, the ball takes a short hop and bounces off the curb before rolling under a car parked along the street. We both nervously wait, hoping to see it roll back out toward us, but the ball refuses to show itself. With it unmistakably stuck, an issue we both often describe as "literally the worst thing in the world," we simultaneously let out a heavy

your turn. Having seemingly forgotten how to miss, you knock down shot after shot as things start to feel like episode 503 of *You Besting Me on the Basketball Court*. I even roll the ball over to you before your next shot rather than passing it, as a foolish attempt to try and throw you off your rhythm. Just like every other time, it fails to work.

During almost all our meetings under the rim, you always seem to get the upper hand on me, make the final shot, or grab the game-sealing rebound. Our honest friendship keeps any potential jealousy at bay, but I recognize your talents. As seen through my eyes, you have it all. A kid's equivalent of wealth, education, healthy living, freedom, and a job with paid vacation days plus dental.

Although the sky turns from gray and gloomy to complete and utter darkness, we continue playing. The flashlight apps on

### **"Our honest friendship keeps any potential jealousy at bay, but I recognize your talents."**

sigh. Wedged under the car's back bumper, the ball awaits rescue while we grin at each other, each hoping the other will get down and dirty to snag the ball. "I got it before," you lazily argue, as if you actually remember the last time the ball snuck away from us like this. Motivated by my desire to play rather than your reasoning, I pick up a nearby stick and poke the ball free, though only after some crawling under the car that leaves my shirt covered with pebbles, dirt, and a few blotches of gray snow.

I'm unable to keep the momentum, and my next shot ricochets off the rim, making it

our iPod Touches strategically placed at the hoop's base illuminate the rim just enough to keep it visible. Neither you nor I see walking away from the game early as a viable option, although anyone who viewed a H-O-R-S-E game as something other than prime-time basketball action might argue otherwise. At last you miss one, but my relief quickly reverts to despair. I miss my next shot, trying once more to pull off a between-the-legs layup. After I toss it back your way, you drill a three-pointer like the Ray Allen game winner we'll talk about the next day before social studies at 1:45 p.m. Around the corner, some

headlights begin to shine our way, fighting through the heaps of darkness.

"Car! Car! Car!" I holler, prompting us to retreat to the sidewalk.

A rusted truck passes by with snow salt residue all across its sides and some exhaust smoke black as coal jetting out behind it. We dash back to the street through the truck's gaseous cloud, hoping its taillights might offer some visibility even for a brief moment. But the darkness returns, and the brief jog fails to warm me up. After breathing some heat back into my fists, I rise up to shoot, but this time my three-pointer rattles off the backboard, leaving a splat of water stretched out across it that slowly begins to drip down onto the gravel. I've lost the game. Denied the chance to banter with you about how the sky's growing darkness stands solely responsible for my demise, I hear my mom's calling voice, forcing us to part ways, but only after we finish our two-minute secret handshake. I should feel relieved at the chance to step inside and warm up, but I do not.

I corral the ball, still soaking wet and with its leather now beginning to peel off like onion skin onto my hands, before I run up the street to my house, glowing from within. My wet sleeves, which I used earlier to wipe off my face, now feel somewhat stiff, with the temperature now likely below the freezing point. Running through my garage before entering the house, I aimlessly toss my ball into a corner. I hear the ball crash into something, with a few more bangs following shortly thereafter, but I choose to ignore the mess at least until tomorrow.

Surrounded by my house's warmth and with some chicken soup on deck, I soon realize the comfort I have missed out on over the last

two hours. My parents make this abundantly clear, contrasting my situation with yours, attempting to teach me a lesson. "Just remember how lucky you are," they say. "Be thankful for what you have." But none of this completely resonates with me, at least now, when I am just a kid, uneducated about real-world hardships. Still, I nod and continue inhaling my food. While the grown-ups watch the news every night, I watch *Drake and Josh* with my siblings, and Nickelodeon's explanation of the world doesn't exactly line up with reality.

The drug issues, alcoholism, and financial woes endured by your family remain difficult for me to imagine. They fly by me as indigestible factors completely foreign to my typical nuclear-family suburban lifestyle. Instead, I only notice that you won the H-O-R-S-E game. I continue struggling to understand almost half the things I hear, with no option but to aimlessly cast them aside. What the hell is a DUI? It sounds like a new character name from my *Transformers* video games. All I know is that my parents won't let me ride in your dad's car to go snowboarding on Saturdays anymore.

My mom's poorly hidden displeasure every time she sees me trot over to meet you outside for another game constantly leaves me feeling puzzled. I reckon it has something to do with my inferior basketball skill set, as compared with yours. That feels like the only logical explanation. Maybe if I win this time, that frown will disappear from her face. The softly spoken "He needs to spend time with a better group of kids" comments I hear my parents exchange behind closed doors leave me thoroughly confused as well. What better kids could they be talking about? You're the best basketball player in town.



**Alexandra  
Manziano**

Layout by Kyle McDonald. Photograph by Alexandr Podvalny: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/meditating-buddha-figurine-325468>.

# Zen

**M**y dad, an Irish-Italian, is a hothead. That's why he took up Zen. That along with the encouragement from some of his like-minded buddies, most likely a symptom of the religion's growing popularity among middle-aged, suburban white men. Guys who just want some damn inner peace and enlightenment, man!

Details aside, my father is a born-again Buddhist. For as long as I can remember, we've had a meditation garden with little Buddha statues and tiny fountains sprinkled throughout our yard. We all acknowledge that it's pretty ironic. I mean, when's the last time you've heard a Zen practitioner howl, "Hey! Don't step in front of those rocks! Respect the fucking Buddha!"

My father has been wandering the Eight-fold Path for enough years to have belonged to several different Ashrams, Zentos, and oh, hot yoga studios, too. He'd never seem to stay in one place for too long, though. The location would always seem to come and go, shrouded in a mystery of spiritualism and secrecy.

I always know if my dad's had a rough day when I smell the burning sandalwood incense as I come home. The bedroom door is shut, the giant blinds in front of his meditation alcove are drawn, and if you hold your breath, you can hear the trickling whisper of the small fountain sitting next to him.

"Go sit" is what my mom tells him after he's repeatedly given her the play-by-play of his drawn-out day.

So he would sit, and it would calm him down. At least for a little while, anyway. As a kid, he'd tell me about how he swears he's transcended, claiming that he was floating on his pillow. I didn't believe him then, but I think I do now.

I think I can now understand being able to separate yourself so far from the physical realm that you feel like you're flying above everything else. His mind must go a mile-a-minute. I know mine does.

So, when it's been a long and tiring day, instead of yelling profanities at the TV, Frank will try to float on his pillow.

I'll try to follow.





## AMINATA CEESAY | Undeclared

Born in the Bronx and raised in a small city named Kotu South, Aminata is an Alfred Hitchcock super fan and poetry enthusiast. On the weekends, you can find her obsessing over one of the books on her "Books to read before you die" list or binge watching every Dick Wolfe TV drama ever made. She has a passion for literature and an even bigger passion for all things film.



## ASHLEY CLEMENS | Magazine Journalism, Writing & Rhetoric

From a town smaller than Syracuse's undergraduate population, Ashley hails from Minnesota. She enjoys reading, writing, and watching YouTube video essays way past her bedtime. Her pursuit of meaning motivates her, and she hopes to be the one putting content into the world, instead of just consuming it.



## LYDIA ENGEL | Music, Citizenship & Civic Engagement

Born and raised in Upstate NY, Lydia spends most of her time complaining about the weather. On the off chance the aforementioned weather allows it, she tries to get outside to go backpacking. Lydia also enjoys singing, writing, antagonizing her two younger sisters, over-using commas, and a good cheesecake.



## BENJAMIN GOLDSMITH | Communication & Rhetorical Studies, Writing & Rhetoric

Originally from the Jersey Shore, it's Ben's mission to prove his coast is not raunchy, but rather charming. Before becoming an *Intertext* editor, he worked at several media outlets as a writer and on-air broadcaster. Ben also enjoys writing pop-punk music and stand-up comedy.



## DREW HARPER | Architecture

Drew, hailing from the suburbs of Chicago, watched *Arachnophobia* (1990) through trembling hands at age 8 and has been gorging himself on all things horror ephemera ever since. Desensitized to all things grisly, he has made it his pastime mission to write something that makes his own skin crawl. On any given day, Drew can be found curled up with a Clive Barker novel listening to gothic industrial music.



## CHLOE HECHTER | Communication & Rhetorical Studies, Writing & Rhetoric

Chloe is a New York City based writer, Nice Jewish Girl, and Diet Coke enthusiast. She can be found writing exposés on frat boys or scream-singing to "Pretty Girl Rock" in the passenger seat of her best friend's car. Some of her passions include but are not limited to: layered necklaces, foods that pretend to be carbs but aren't actually carbs, and almond milk lattes.



## CAMERON MACAULAY | Broadcast & Digital Journalism

Whether it's posting memes on Twitter or creating visual content for CitrusTV Sports, the drive to tell stories has always motivated Cameron, who mixes a background in journalism with a laid-back style of content creation. Despite hailing from Boulder, Colorado, he'd much prefer to stay indoors and support his favorite teams: Arsenal F.C, the Denver Nuggets, and Syracuse Men's Lacrosse among others.



## KYLE MCDONALD | Writing & Rhetoric, Digital Humanities

Raised in the small town of New Canaan, CT, Kyle is a passionate sports fan, but maybe a little too passionate. As a Jets fan, Kyle always finds himself trying to make the most out of every losing season. When not consuming sports content, you can find him making some for his followers.



## JEANETTE ORLANDO | Television, Radio & Film, Writing & Rhetoric

Jeanette is a student at Syracuse University studying Television, Radio & Film and Writing & Rhetoric. Based on Long Island, Jeanette has a passion for bagels and beaches. Jeanette writes for a Syracuse University late-night show, *Live from Studio B*, and hopes to write in the entertainment industry.



## ARIEL SAMUEL | Writing & Rhetoric, Digital Humanities

Born on the mean streets of Fairfax, Virginia, Ariel enjoys spending her time drinking iced matcha lattes, talking to her cat, and fueling her escapism with Minecraft. She hasn't always enjoyed writing, but since coming to Syracuse, she has a newfound (her parents would argue the "new" aspect) love for writing arguments.



## MIRA SICKINGER | Biology, Writing & Rhetoric

Originating from the rainy tech hub of Seattle, WA, Mira has been passionate about writing in the fields of science and technology since she was in grade school. When she isn't wading through days' worth of procrastinated premed homework, she might be spotted weight training in the Barnes Center. Mira loves makeup, sketching, street fashion, and logging hundreds of hours in Animal Crossing.



## BONNIE YU | Architecture

Born and raised in New York City, Bonnie is an aspiring designer and writer, board game enthusiast, recovering coffee addict, lover of em dashes, semicolons, and bewildering sentences. She binge watches bad TV, owns too many kitchen gadgets, and can usually be found wrestling some kind of paper/fabric/yarn/etc. in her living room turned quarantine studio.

Layout by Bonnie Yu.



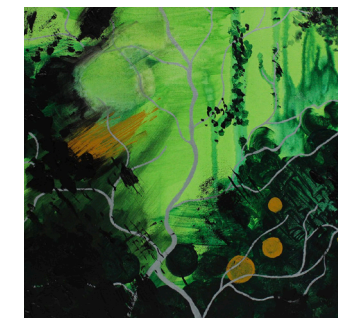
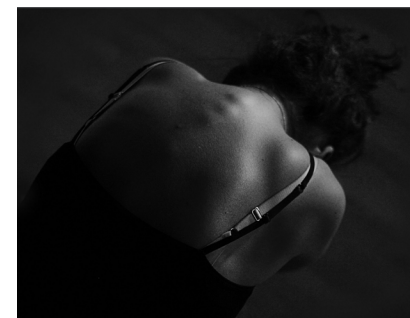


**Dalia Emilia** is an artist and designer, currently pursuing a BFA in Fibers at the Savannah College of Art & Design.

[www.daliaemilia.com](http://www.daliaemilia.com)



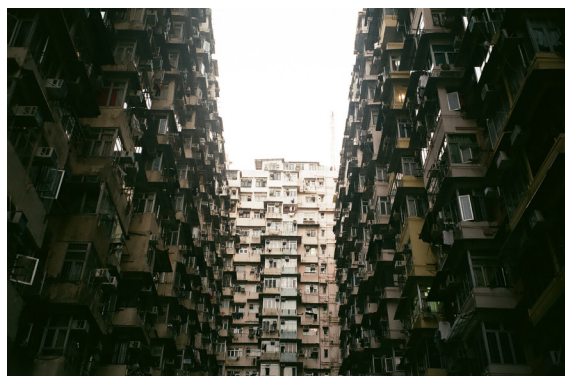
Layout by Lydia Engel.



**Julianna Markus** is a Communication and English student with a flare for creative experimentation across mediums, from painting, photography, graphic design, and videography, to music, dance, and the performing arts. [www.juliannamarkus.com](http://www.juliannamarkus.com)

**Hanzhang Lai** is a fifth-year undergraduate student at Syracuse University pursuing a Bachelor of Architecture degree, and minoring in Communication Photography.

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**Julianna McCaffrey** is a Studio Arts major from Miami, Florida, who works mainly in portraiture and paint mediums.



**Kristina Starowitz's** work invites the viewer into a narrative space where her fracture and reconstruction of surface contexts create relevant moments of access, reconnecting the audience with their own stories and images. Featured here from left: "Manifest" and "the gift, Wing."

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